Out100

WILSON CRUZ

SAVES THE WORLD

WITH:
JANAYA KHAN
JANELLE MONÁE
JOE MANTELLO
GINA YASHERE
RASHAD ROBINSON
PATRICK STARRR
KEKE PALMER
CHEYENNE JACKSON
MARY TRUMP
RACHEL MADDOW
ANDRÉ LEON TALLEY
THOMAS BEATTIE
SAM FEDER
LIZZO
+ BIDEN'S DREAM TEAM

CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE 2020 OUT100

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Congratulations to the innovators who are the 2020 OUT100. Your impact and influence create a lasting mark on the world, as well as a better tomorrow. We celebrate you.

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Prototype shown with options. ©2020 Lexus

Out100

OUT100

26-98
In the year that changed the world, here are some of our favorite LGBTQ+ folks who changed it for the better.
By Out Editors

28 Cruz Control Pioneering out gay star of stage and screen Wilson Cruz proves life gets better (and sexier) as you go along.
By Diane Anderson-Minshall

30 Magnificient Monáe
Our favorite pansexual pop star, Janelle Monáe, makes the leap onto the big screen in *Antebellum*.
By Tracy E. Gilchrist

32 Future Fighter Social activist, author, and speaker Janaya Khan is the leader the world needs now.
By Desirée Guerrero

34 The Mantello Method
Veteran Broadway actor and director Joe Mantello goes *Hollywood*.
By David Artavia

LEGACIES

99
My Friend Larry Kramer
Actor Matt Bomer remembers writer and activist Larry Kramer.
By Matt Bomer

100
A Final Farewell Paying tribute to some of the LGBTQ+ legends we lost this year.
By Out Editors

COVER 1: Wilson Cruz photographed by **THE RIKER BROTHERS** / **COVER 2:** Janelle Monáe photographed by **DANIELLE LEVITT** / **COVER 3:** Janaya Khan photographed by **NABIL ELDERKIN**
COVER 4 & ABOVE: Joe Mantello photographed by **LUKE FONTANA** / **ABOVE:** Black suit, shirt, and glasses are Joe's own. Watch by Tom Ford.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020. Volume 29, Number 3 *Out* (ISSN 1062-7928) is published six times a year by Pride Media, P.O. Box 241579, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Telephone: (310) 806-4288. Entire contents © 2020 Pride Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Reproductions in whole or in part without express permission of the publisher are strictly prohibited. Periodicals postage paid at Los Angeles, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rate: $19.95 per year. Annual subscription rate outside the U.S.: $54, payable in U.S. currency only. Postmaster: Send changes of address to Out magazine, PO Box 2660 New York, NY 10108. Out is distributed to newsstands by Curtis Circulation Co. Printed in the United States of America.

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Sophia **Lillis**
Peter **Macdissi**
Judy **Greer**
Steve **Zahn**
Lois **Smith**
with Margo **Martindale**
and Stephen **Root**

Uncle Frank

Written and Directed by Alan **Ball**

No one comes home without baggage.

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THANKSGIVING | prime video

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STYLE 360

12
Holiday Spirit These gifts will warm even the Grinchiest of hearts this holiday season.

COVET

17
Classic Ford Designer Tom Ford is helping save the Earth in style.

18
The Nas X Factor Lil Nas X and designer Christian Cowan join forces for queer Black youth.

WORLD AIDS DAY

16
The Long Road Reflecting on the past and future of HIV.

AFTER HOURS

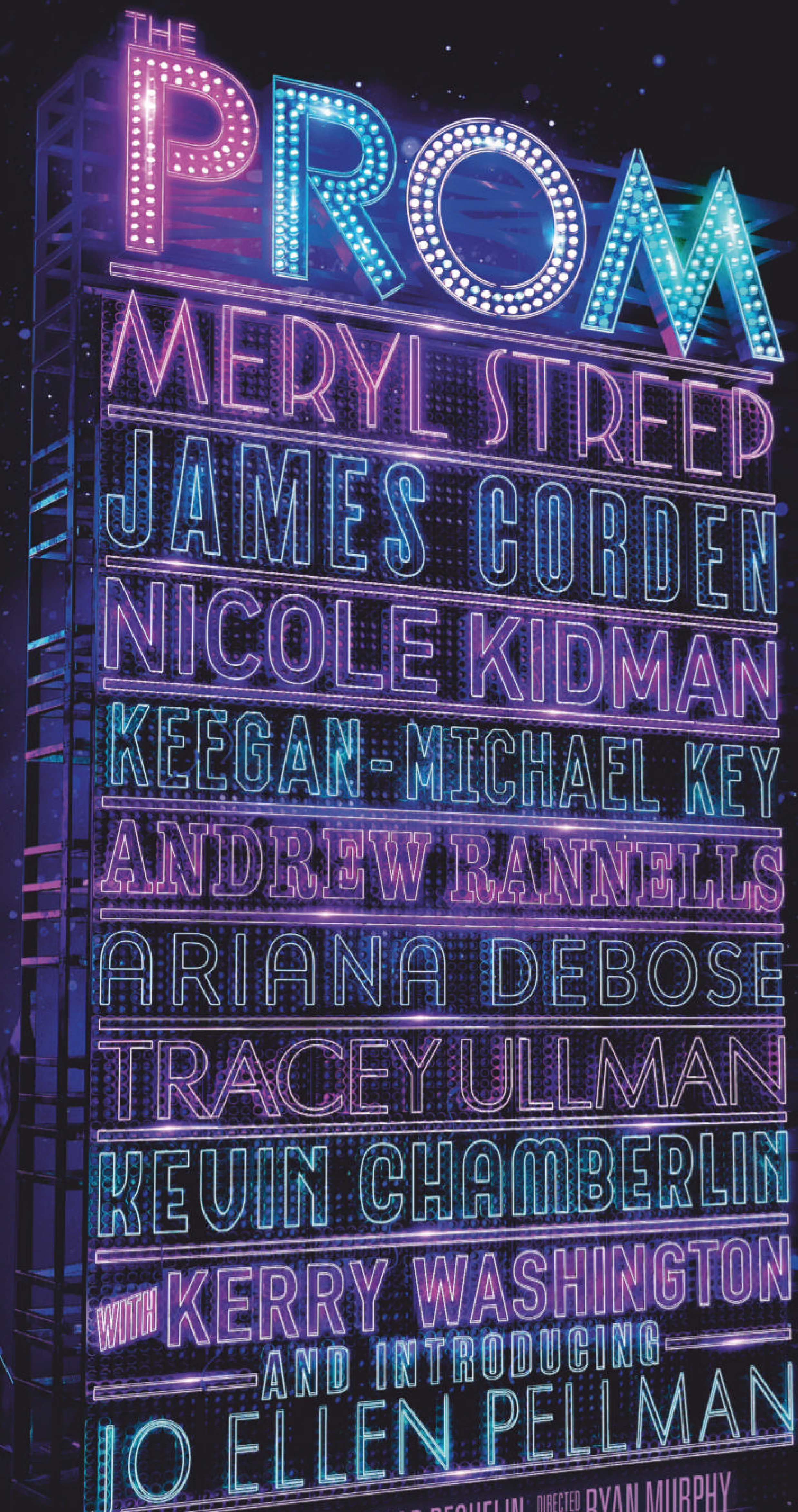
101 COCKTAILS
Diamonds Are Forever Why go out to a bar when you can bring it to you with a little help from Tiffany's?

102 LATE-NIGHT MOVIE
Bad Hair Day Filmmaker Justin Simien and star Laverne Cox weave Black hair and horror together in *Bad Hair*.

104 SWIPED
No More Safe Sex? 2020 was tough for single queers. Where do we go from here?

ABOVE: Out100 cover star **WILSON CRUZ**

THE RIKER BROTHERS


THE
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ARIANA DEBOSE
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AND INTRODUCING
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SCREENPLAY BY BOB MARTIN & CHAD BEGUELIN DIRECTED BY RYAN MURPHY

IN SELECT THEATERS DECEMBER AND ON

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PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
PG-13
THEMATIC ELEMENTS, SOME SUGGESTIVE/SEXUAL REFERENCES AND LANGUAGE

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A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO
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Out100

Hamming it up with our new editor in chief, David Artavia

ON DAVID
Suit by Burberry
Polo shirt by TY-LR

ON DIANE
Dress by Stine Goya

FOR A QUEER GIRL IN THE '90S, Wilson Cruz — who sprang onscreen as sweet gay teen Rickie on *My So-Called Life* opposite Claire Danes and Jared Leto — was the patron saint of Gen X TV. It was still years before other milestones, before Ellen Degeneres came out on TV, longer before *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offered up a queer couple, a decade before *The Wire* slightly destigmatized being a Black gay man, and a full 25 years before *Pose* told the stories of Black and brown LGBTQ+ folks to mainstream audiences. For my friends, Rickie was the first unabashedly out queer series star *our* age. When ABC canceled *My So-Called Life*, I joined with legions of disappointed fans who donated money to what became the first internet campaign to try and keep a TV show airing. I had to forgo lunch for a week to do so. ("It almost worked!" Wilson tells me.)

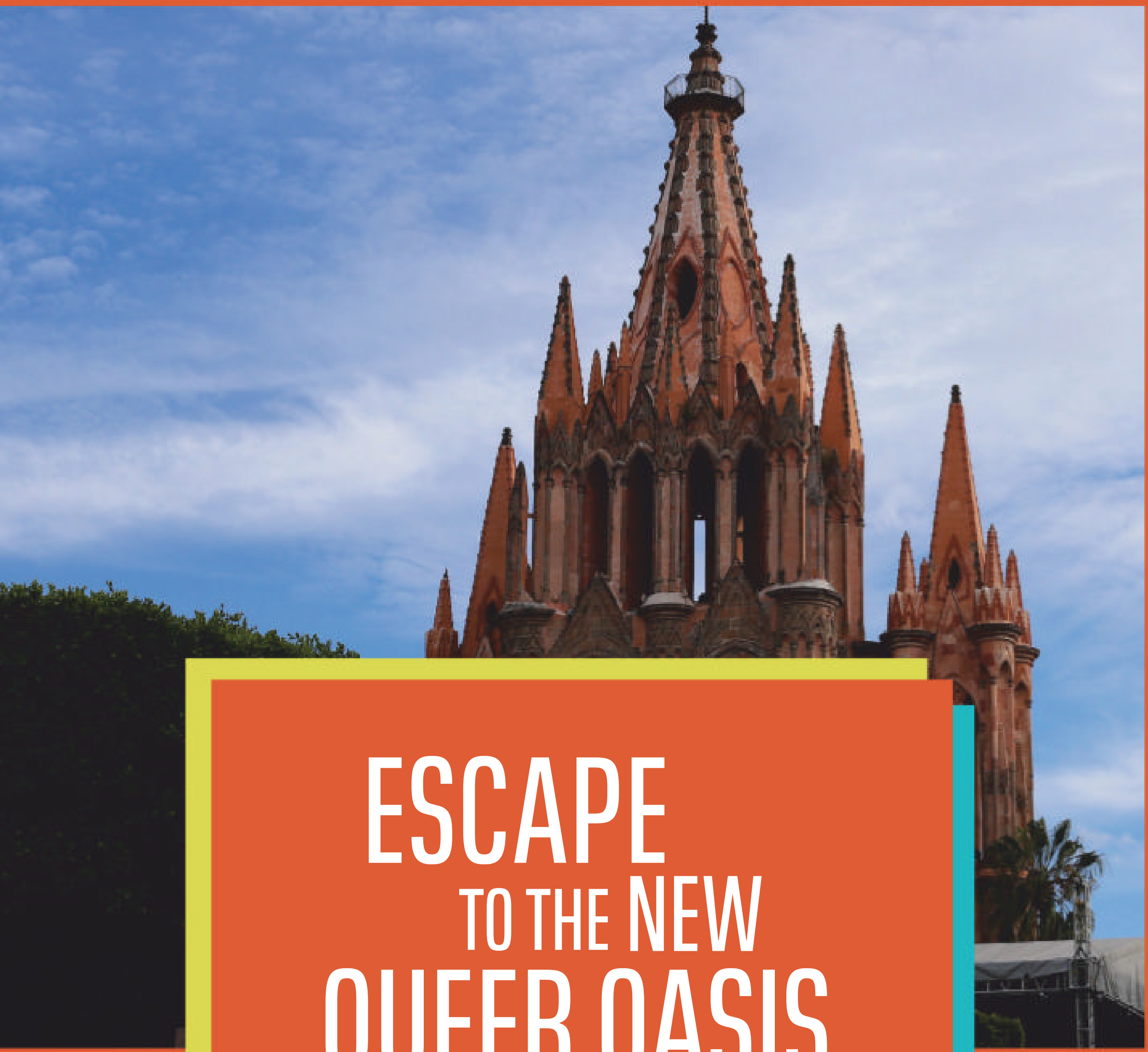
I was thrilled when we named Wilson Cruz to our annual Out100 list, a collection of LGBTQ+ trailblazers, artists, leaders, and creatives who have used their talent and voices to influence change and visibility in the last year. He joins our other brilliant cover stars: Janaya Khan, Janelle Monáe, and Joe Mantello, each amazing in their own right. And there are 94 others inside, from 15-year-old trans musician Flyn Sant (Flowerkid) to 99-year-old WWII veteran pilot Robina Asti.

Now more than ever, it's important to highlight the monumental achievements the LGBTQ+ community has made against the backdrop of a giant cultural shift and an evolving landscape of entertainment, politics, social justice, industry, and so much more. This list is critical. Before I was in charge of *Out*, I long dreamed of making it on the list myself. I never did but it still pushed me to do better.

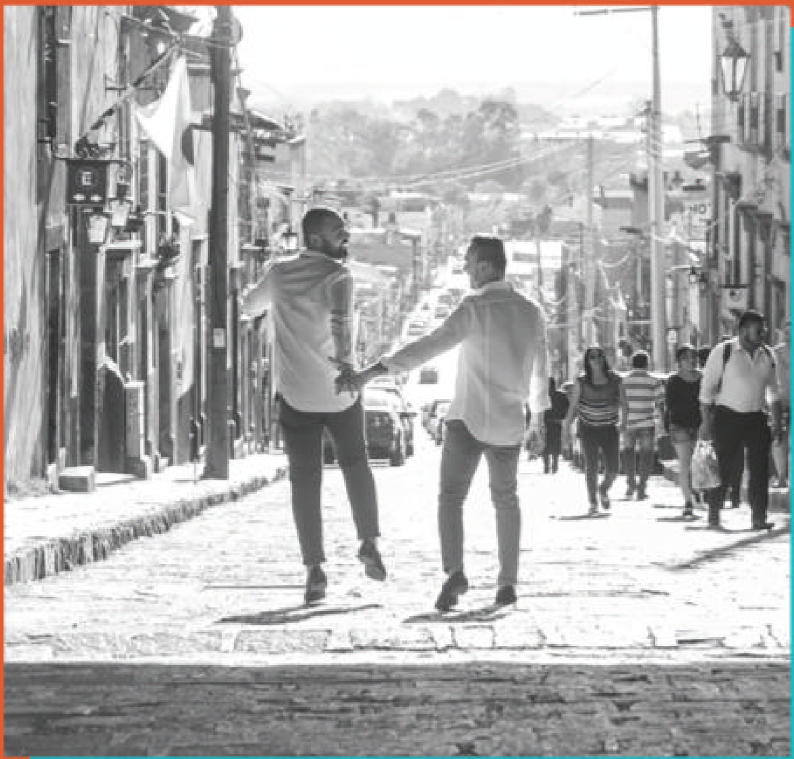
As the first female editorial director (and perhaps the first Zuni/Choctaw out in LGBTQ+ media), I've been thrilled to work on this year's Out100 and to introduce our new editor in chief, David Artavia. My right hand for the last few years (at *The Advocate*, *Chill*, and *Plus* magazines), David joins a lofty roster of former editors, from co-founder and the mag's first editor in chief, Michael Goff (who hired my brilliant late friend, Sarah Pettit, in 1992 as executive editor) to the longest serving editor, British sophisticate Aaron Hicklin, to the short-tenured but impactful Phillip Picardi. Each editor has felt an obligation to bring queer stories to the forefront so we can celebrate them and inspire the next generation. David will fit perfectly in that tradition and bring his own innovations to the magazine in 2021 and beyond. I'll still be here, shepherding this brand I love, but magazines — as our culture's ultimate storytellers — thrive on change and innovation and editors who listen to what readers really want to see in these pages. We both promise to listen in 2021.

DIANE ANDERSON-MINSHALL
CEO & Editorial Director

PHOTO BY LUKE FONTANA + STYLING BY BENJAMIN HOLTROP



ESCAPE TO THE NEW QUEER OASIS



IT'S DIFFICULT TO FIND THE BEST WORDS TO DESCRIBE SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE: a large town with a historic UNESCO World Heritage site; a small city with a rich, artistic culture that is found in everything from its impressive architecture to its coveted gastronomy scene; a place that boasts one of the most eclectic communities of diverse expats and locals in the world. Whether you're looking for a classic bar scene or want to day trip with your partner (or partners), San Miguel is a city of openness that accommodates LGBTQ+ travelers with optimism. Since most of the expat community consists of artists and those who are heavily influenced by them, everything from interior design to leisurely walks around San Miguel is as alluring and quaint as the people you will see throughout the cobblestone streets. As San Miguel Pride grows each year in early July, queer travelers are able to soak in San Miguel's rich history and activities that accommodate honeymooners and LGBTQ+ singles alike from mezcal tastings to horseback riding. Whether you would like to visit San Miguel for a Christmas and New Year's Eve celebration full of go-getter travelers and dazzling fireworks or for a summer escape to find inspiration in an artist's retreat, San Miguel is a unique and enigmatic destination that is sure to capture your attention in the best possible way.

San Miguel isn't just the bona fide cultural LGBTQ+ oasis that's on the rise—it's a dreamy destination that is sure to have you longing for authentic escape once again. So, what are you waiting for? ¡Visit San Miguel as soon as you get the chance, quench that thirst, and be a part of the SMA cultura with us, bébé!

SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE
THE HEART OF MEXICO

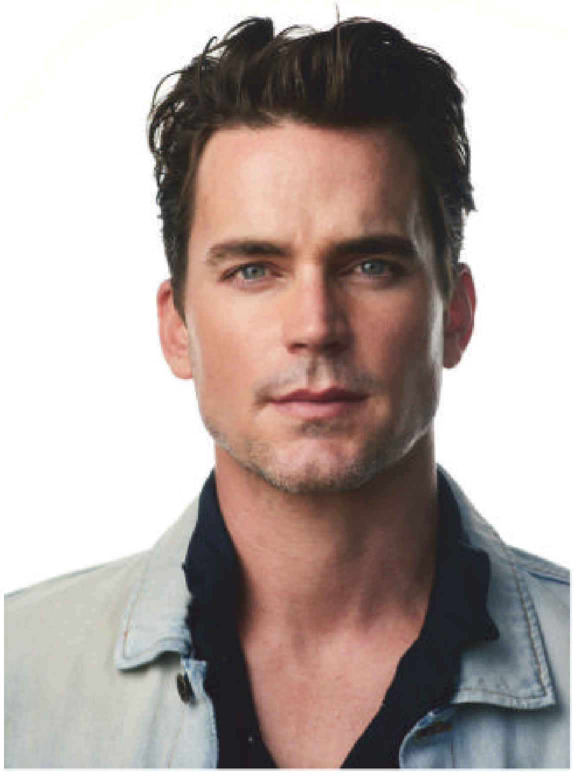
Guanajuato
Live Great Stories

Check out the rest of this article at Out.com/SanMiguel

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH R. ARRIETA FRAGOSO @RAFAELGRIGON

THE TEAM

Out November/December 2020



MATT BOMER

Matt Bomer is a beloved and celebrated actor known for his roles in television, stage, and film. Starring in USA's *White Collar* elevated him to the A-List and since then, he's appeared in shows like *Glee*, *American Horror Story*, *Doom Patrol*, and *The Sinner*. He's also had acclaimed roles in films like the *Magic Mike* franchise, Ryan Murphy's *The Normal Heart*, and Netflix's *The Boys in the Band* (he also starred in the 2018 Broadway revival of the latter). Bomer is a proud LGBTQ+ rights activist, and lives with his husband Simon Halls and their three children in Los Angeles. In this issue, he pays tribute to writer, activist, and icon Larry Kramer, who died in May (page 99). @mattbomer

MEY RUDE

Our new staff writer, Mey Rude, joined just in time for the Out100 (page 26). A lesbian, Latina, trans woman from Idaho, Rude is now living her West Coast dreams in Los Angeles. She's been writing about queer and trans issues and pop culture for seven years and hopes to do it for 70 more. Aside from writing, Mey loves to cook for her friends, enjoy her terrible taste in music, worship Mexican folk saints and spend time with her two girlfriends. If she could tell you just one thing, it would be, "Bless." @meyrude

ALEXANDER CHEVES

Alexander Cheves is a writer, editor, copywriter, freelance illustrator, and sex educator living in New York City. His work has appeared in *Plus*, *VICE*, *Them*, *The Body*, *Hornet Stories*, and many other publications. In 2016, he launched the sex column "Sexy Beast" in our sister publication, *The Advocate*. He recently signed a two-book deal with Unbound Edition Press, the first of which is a collection of essays set to be released this fall. In this issue, the author writes about the nuances of dating, cruising, and digital connection against the backdrop of the pandemic (page 104). @BadAlexCheves

ALL FOUR OUT100 COVERS

Out100
JANAYA KHAN
BUILDS BRIDGES
Out100
JANELLE MONÁE
SHOWS US THE WAY
Out100
JOE MANTELLO
COMES TO HOLLYWOOD
Out100
WILSON CRUZ
SAVES THE WORLD

BRIAN BOWEN SMITH (BOMER); COURTESY SUBJECT (RUDE); JON DEAN (CHEVES)

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20 Lux Holiday Gifts You Should Buy & Keep

IF YOU CAN STILL AFFORD IT AFTER THIS YEAR, THEN TREAT YOURSELF FIRST TO ONE OF THESE.

By Marco Medrano & Diane Anderson-Minshall

Ray-Ban goes queer with the latest edition of **Ray-Ban Studios** (their series of limited edition music-inspired product collaborations), this time with **DJ Patrick Mason**, who co-created the brand's first custom made product. This reinvention of the State Street model taken from the Ray-Ban archives comes from Mason, the influential club kid, DJ, artist, and half of SRVD (the band inspired by New York's vogue scene), who's at the forefront of Berlin's dance music, fashion, art, music, and LGBTQ+ scene. Inspired by "oblivion and the creation of the universe," according to Mason (left), his design includes obsidian black upper and amber lower frame, lightly mirrored photochromatic lenses, magnetic balls at the temples (with an oversized link chain) and an egg-shaped packaging. This limited edition may be sold out by the time you read this (hello, eBay!) but you can still get the original inspiration, the **Ray-Ban Statestreet,** (above) which is nearly as sweet and easier on the wallet. (Mason's pair: $516, DoverStreetMarket.com; Statestreet: $215, ray-ban.com)

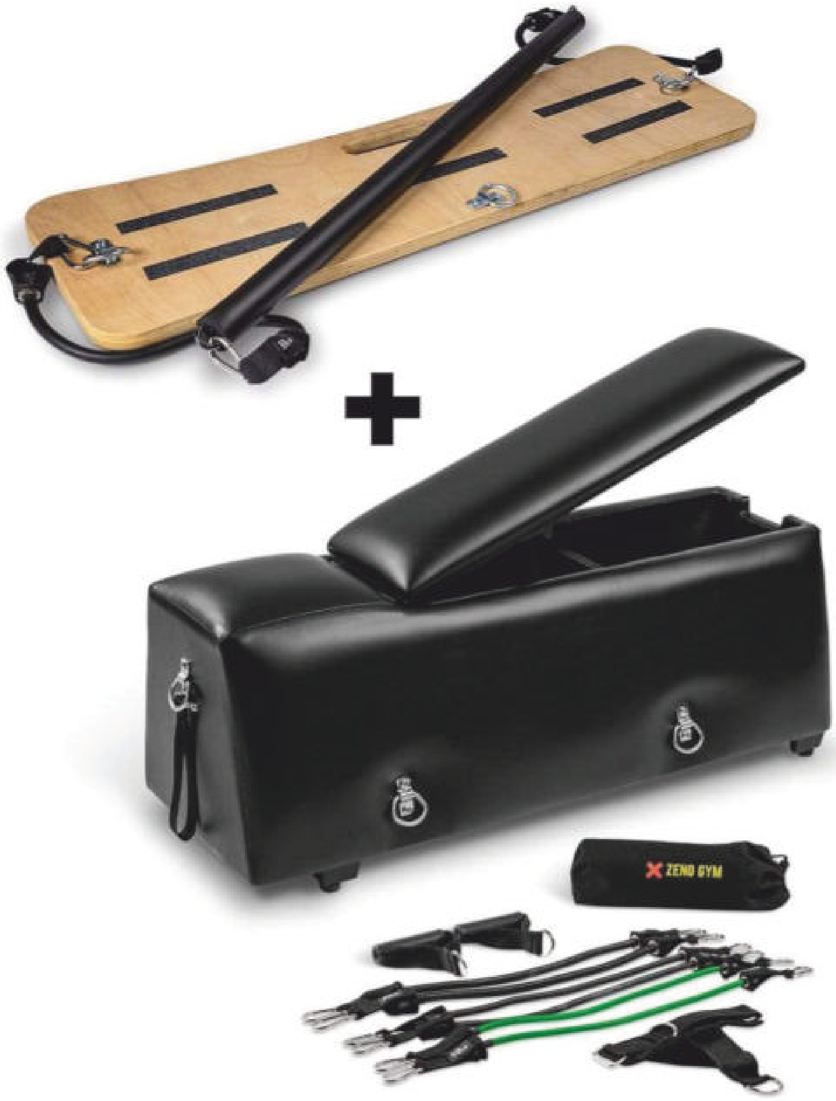
Kick it with our favorite new shoes (from top) like these gorgeous winter-ready chunky **DKNY oxfords** ($169, DonnaKaran.com). The must-have for well-heeled shoe lovers (like this **Tasca Camouflage Hair Calf Slip On Pocket Loafer**) comes from Mark Schwartz Shoes for Men ($595, markschwartzmensshoes.com). Or walk the talk with these **Yellow Rage ZR V2 Urban Combat X9X** ($89, mensluxuryboutique.com), where cobbler couture meets combat in the world of sneaker must-haves.

Suit up and keep it warm this season with a statement for you — this classic but modern **Redemption Trench** — and a **Vince Cable Knit Sweater** for your fur babe. Why can't canines wear cashmere, too? ($1,780, redemption.com; $125, vince.com)

Even if they weren't a financial supporter of LGBTQ+ media like *Out*, we'd be gagging for the open-air exhilaration of the **Lexus 2021 LC Convertible Inspiration**, especially the limited edition with the bespoke Amalfi white leather–trimmed seats, the 13-speaker surround sound, heated steering wheel, climate "concierge" upper body heating, SmartAccess card key — and the bonus Zero Halliburton travel case set (and in case you were wondering: yes, you can buy the car and have Lexus send someone else the travel case as a gift). ($120,000, lexus.com)

This **Rad Runner 1 Electric Utility Bike** gets cruising 45 miles per hour — and has 330 optional accessory combinations, including a Passenger Package and Center Console, so you can accessorize to your heart's content. ($1,200, radpowerbikes.com)

Can't leave the house? The monthly membership (games, features, integrations, and real-time feedback) and the craftsman aesthetics make **Ergatta** much more impressive than traditional rowing machines. And when the gorgeous cherry wood machine is closed it looks like something you'd want to display in your front room instead of hiding in your closet. ($2,199 + $29 monthly membership, ergatta.com)



The **Zeno Bench Pro** with Squat Board is answering the call to our new normal of homebound circuit training. Compact, chic, tough and effective — without having to assemble industrial-size steel gym parts — this is the fitness partner we needed. ($799, zenogym.com)

Freeee your minnnnnd...and the rest will follow! **Powermask by Silent Mode** is a sturdy, true-blackout luxury headband that promotes power naps, deeper sleep, mental fitness, and meditative exercises via the acclaimed **Breathonics App**. This game changer can take your everyday music to supersonic or your entire psyche to another level — and a new you. ($179, silentmode.com)

SILENTMODE

ALL PRODUCTS COURTESY MAKERS (PAGES 12-15)

BULLDOG
Body Wash
Original Bar Soap
Age Defence Trio Set

Bulldog Skincare For Men could actually be, in fact, man's best friend (sorry, Spot). This miraculous product proves that "pure and natural" can still be tough on wrinkles and aging. Each range of Bulldog's offerings focuses on normal, sensitive, oily, or mature skin with ingredients that include willow bark, aloe, juniper, and baobab. The large-sized soaps and amazing smelling body washes make Bulldog a no-brainer. (from $13.99, bulldogskincare.com)

Pasta & Love (shave + protect) by Davines is your assurance that pure, rare, old-world ingredients also are super hip. One of the most emollient-based, professional luxury lines is also known for its exceptional "scentsory" nirvana. ($30, amazon.com)

MANTL
MANTL
MANTL

MANTL has men learning to "embrace the bald" with amazing skin. With Aloe Barbadensis Leaf Juice, Retinyl, and Squalane (olive) under the hood, their streamlined regimen with disappearing SPF is enhanced by their beautiful holiday box set. ($27 and up, mantl.co)

MOSCHINO
TOY BOY
EAU DE PARFUM
100 ML e / 3.4 US Fl.Oz.
MOSCHINO

Boy does the House of MOSCHINO ever deliver. Playful. Exotic. Elegant. With top notes of Italian Bergamot, **TOY BOY Eau De Parfum Spray for men** (left) hits a home run here with a waft of clove buds and a vetiver base. No question about it: This very sophisticated parfum is next-level great and it's also housed in a memorable collector's item teddy bear carafe. (from $82, sephora.com)

SELF/ish
FACIAL CLEANSER
SELF/ish
OIL-FREE MOISTURIZER

The formulating chemists **SELF/ish** (left) are renowned and trusted, the packaging is minimal, and their proprietary Active Acid Complex gives your skin a punch of Vitamin A, B, C, E, and F. SELF/ish's Exfoliating Pads and Face Scrub set the ingredients stage for all the good stuff and none of the bad. Done. ($38 and up, selfishskin.com)

BLACK RESERVE
Pit Boss
ORIGINAL
BLACK
SAGEWOOD

Jack Black has managed to make state-of-the-art skin science playful, results-oriented and manly—with advanced hero products such as **Power Peel Pads, CBD + HA Serum, Nighttime BAK-up Retinol Alternative** and **Dry Erase Ultra-Calming Face Cream** (perfect for rough winter skin). Regardless of your age, there's a cream, serum or body cleanser that can take you from the gym to a black-tie soirée. And Jack Black's holiday gift pack selections are epic. (Prices vary, getjackblack.com)

Solo Hydrating Defense
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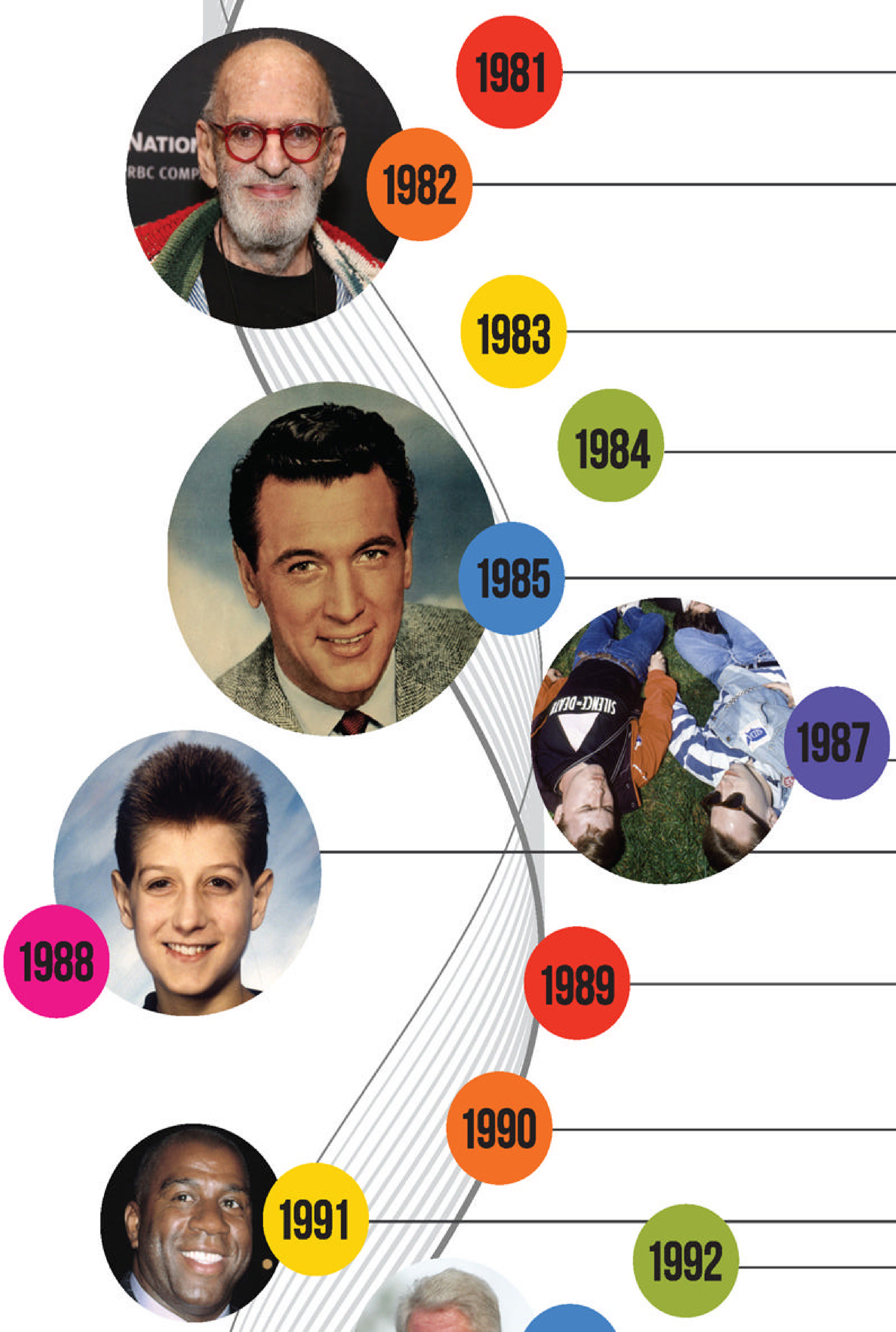
skinbetter SCIENCE
1 FL OZ e 30 ML
transform lifting
Instant Effect Gel EYE
skinbetter SCIENCE
sunbetter
skinbetter SCIENCE

SkinBetter is a medically derived problem solver for those with mature skin and/or constant correcting of spots, sagging and those approaching "regeneration slow-down." SkinBetter is a refined, compact, potent product line that allows for luxury and simplicity. ($125 and up, skinbetter.com)

WORLD AIDS DAY: A TIMELINE



1981

June 5, The CDC reports the first cases that will become known as AIDS.

1982

Gay Men's Health Crisis is founded by Larry Kramer, Nathan Fain, Lawrence D. Mass, Paul Popham, Paul Rapoport, and Edmund White to serve those with HIV.

The term AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is adopted after the disease is shown to not be gay-specific.

1983

AIDS activist Bobbi Campbell appears with his partner, Bobby Hilliard, on the cover of *Newsweek,* the first time two gay men are pictured embracing on the cover of a national mainstream magazine. Campbell dies the next year.

The World Health Organization holds its first meeting to assess the global AIDS situation and begins international surveillance.

1984

The *New York Times* reports AIDS, may be transmissible through saliva. It will be another two years before proof emerges that this is not true.

1985

After years of silence, President Ronald Reagan mentions AIDS for the first time, calling it "a top priority."

Rock Hudson dies of AIDS at age 59 and leaves $250,000 to help set up the American Foundation for AIDS Research. Elizabeth Taylor serves as the organization's founding national chairman.

The first HIV tests are approved for use to screen donated blood.

1987

Larry Kramer co-founds the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York City.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt goes on display on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

1988

Ryan White, the Indiana teenager with HIV, testifies before the President's Commission on AIDS about the anti-HIV stigma he endures. He dies in 1990 18.

The World Health Organization observes the first World AIDS Day

1989

Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), allows HIV-positive people who do not qualify for clinical trials access to experimental treatments.

By the end of the year, nearly 100,000 people are diagnosed with HIV in the U S.

1990

The Ryan White CARE Act is enacted, the largest federally-funded program in the United States for people living with HIV.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves (AZT) for pediatric AIDS.

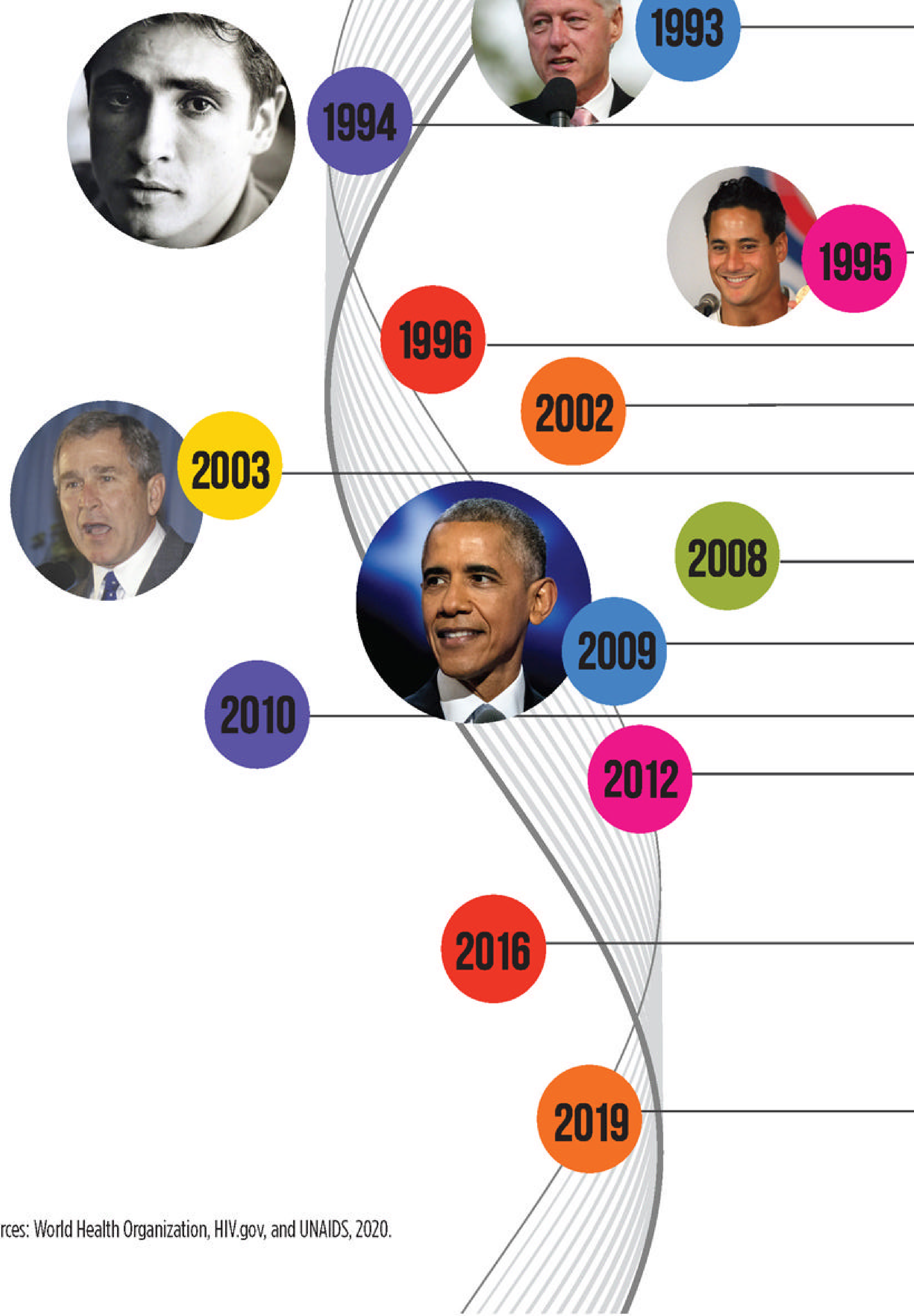
1991

NBA star Earvin "Magic" Johnson announces he's HIV-positive

1992

AIDS becomes the number one cause of death for U.S. men aged 25 to 44.

The first combination drug therapies for HIV are introduced.



1993 President Bill Clinton establishes the White House Office of National AIDS Policy.

1994 WHO estimates 13 million to 14 million people are living with HIV worldwide.

Pedro Zamora becomes the first out gay man with HIV on TV on *The Real World.* He dies hours after the finale airs.

The FDA approves an oral HIV test, the first nonblood-based antibody test for HIV.

1995 The FDA approves the first protease inhibitor, which ushers in a new era of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), and extends life-spans of those living with HIV.

Greg Louganis, Olympic gold medal diver, comes out HIV-positive.

1996 In October, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is displayed in its entirety for the last time. It covers the entire National Mall in Washington, D.C.

2002 WHO issues its first full guidelines on HIV treatment.

2003 George W. Bush launches the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relieft (PEPFAR), which has provided more than $80 billion in funding for HIV treatment, prevention, and research, making it the largest global health program for a single disease in history.

2008 Timothy Ray Brown, suffering from leukemia and HIV, is "functionally cured" through a bone marrow transplant. He dies in September 2020 of leukemia.

2009 President Obama launches the Global Health Initiative (GHI), a six-year, U.S. $63 billion effort to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing global health in low- and middle-income countries. PEPFAR serves as a core component.

2010 Obama lifts the HIV travel and immigration bands and signs the Affordable Care Act.

2012 The FDA approves Gilead's Truvada for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). People who adhere to the regimen have virtually no chance of contracting HIV.

2016 Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U) campaign is launched by the Prevention Access Campaign. The consensus is that when on treatment with an undetectable viral load it's impossible for an HIV+ person to transmit the virus to others.

New York City becomes the first city in the world to recognize U=U.

UNAIDS launches its ambitious 90–90–90 targets, aiming to bring HIV diagnosis, treatment, and viral suppression to the vast majority of people living with HIV by the end of 2020.

2019 The U.S. launches Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America, to end the HIV epidemic in the United States by 2030 by coordinating government programs, resources, and health agencies.

Sources: World Health Organization, HIV.gov, and UNAIDS, 2020.

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Photography by Luke Fontana
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Just Friends: Lil Nas X + Christian Cowan

When the U.K.-based designer and rapper broke the internet with their trailblazing fashion collab at the 2019 VMAs, everyone wanted more. Now they're giving it to us in a new punk-infused Spring 2021 collection that benefits Black queer youth in Atlanta — and they brought a few other A-listers for the ride. The two creative pals recently talked shop with us about their own inspirations and how they incorporate their unique points of view into their daily style.

By David Artavia   Photography by Vijat Mohindra

LIL NAS X
CHRISTIAN COWAN

Opposite (from left): Rachel Cargle, Hanne Gaby Odiele, and Violet Chachki. Above: Lil Nas X showing off his guns.

Above: Lil Nas X (pink) and Christian Cowan (gold) took cues from queer iconography. Opposite: Marc Jacobs and Heidi Klum

Out: This collection is so much fun. How did you begin the creative process?

Christian Cowan: We first collaborated at the 2019 Video Music Awards and it was sick. Then when it came to Fashion Week, I wanted to do a collab with someone. It had to be Lil Nas, because I'm so inspired by so much that you do. You're not only blending these music genres but you're also a proud trailblazer, which is everything we live for. It felt very natural on my end, and then we just created. I felt like we didn't hold back and we had you in pink glitter and just serving all the different fantasies.

Lil Nas X: 100 [percent]. I feel like with the shoot, it wasn't super held back. I hate when everything is all held back. Everything came together, it was super exciting, and things were fun and eye-catching. It was a fun process. It had an amazing cause. It was something I was super happy to be a part of.

Proceeds from the collection will benefit Black queer youth in Atlanta via the Loveland Foundation, a nonprofit founded by activist Rachel Cargle.

Nas: Yeah. That was part of the discussion early on. It was like, OK, we could definitely use this moment to do something for our community, you know? I wanted to give back to the Black trans community and I feel like this was the perfect time to do it. It's two people that are big in the community coming together and doing this.

Cowan: I was a weird kid in the middle of the countryside in England and didn't fit in. Then when we fled to London when I was 16, my trans brothers and sisters are the ones who made me feel celebrated and fab. It's always been an important cause for us.

Have you always been this free in expressing yourselves through fashion and art?

Cowan: I was always super weird. I could never work out how to fit in, so I think it's really important for role models — and I don't *feel* like a role model — to just be unapologetically themselves and to not try and blend and fit into something else. Nas is the perfect example of that within music. Then for me, I've never really followed the path within fashion that most follow.... It's about taking my own road. I've just always been a bit funky.

Nas: On my side, this is still a growing process for me. I'm still 100 percent stepping out of my comfort zone, you know, day by day. There's a lot more to go. I feel like last year was a big part of that — the past couple years themselves — and you know, getting involved with the [LGBTQ+] community and being more comfortable with myself and not being afraid to try new things. It's easy to say, but once you actually face it, it's much harder, especially when you have all these eyes watching. For a long time, I was a people pleaser. I wanted to make sure everybody was comfortable. But, you know, I'm getting rid of that.

Cowan: I totally relate to the people pleaser part. I used to be so on it to make everyone around me feel comfortable. As soon as I was like, *I don't give a fuck*, I've just been so much happier and doing my thing. And I've been way more successful because of it.

The universe seems to reward people for being themselves, right? People are attracted to authenticity and genuineness, so in a way your audience finds you as a result.

Nas: 100.

Cowan: Also, they're attracted to that uniqueness and they find it endearing as well. I think people just love someone who

just marches to the beat of their own drum. It's a cheesy saying, but it's true.

Nas: Yeah, it's [about] inspiring them. It makes them be like, *OK, maybe I should do this. It's working out well for them so I should be more myself too.*

Who are your fashion and musical inspirations?

Nas: As of now, I like the more wild side of fashion. Gaga, of course, you know, she's crazy. I feel like, in my own opinion, nobody's done it as crazy as her. Like, Michael [Jackson]. He's incredible. Rihanna, of course. No brainer. On the fashion side, I'd say those are my top three.

Cowan: My top three: John Galliano was my everything growing up — didn't agree with some of the personal statements he made, but as a fashion figure, it was just the pinnacle of what fashion has ever been. And Gareth Pugh, at the time, was everything to me. And then Gaga...I was like 13 when Gaga came onto the scene and that shit blew my mind. I remember being in the countryside watching the "Alejandro" music video on repeat being like, *This is the sickest shit I've ever seen.* She completely inspired me. And I feel like she really inspired everyone within a certain age group because she was the sickest thing that was around.

How would you describe your personal style?

Cowan: I play characters. In the day, I'm like, *Do I want to be '50s suburban? Or do I want to be '80s, like, tight black everything?* There's always a different character, and that makes my day so much more interesting because you can kind of act into it a bit more. Some days, I'm way more fem and fabulous, and then other days, I'm super preppy. I just play around. It isn't really one thing. I love gold jewelry! That's one thing that stays.

Nas: I say the exact same thing. I really like to play different characters. I like to jump into whatever I'm feeling at that moment, you know? And it's very experimental.

It's all about never repeating the same day twice.

Nas: I agree.

Cowan: Honestly, RuPaul spoke the wisest words: "You're born naked and the rest is drag." Like, every day is basically drag. You can just make up whatever you want to be. It's such a better way to look at life.

If we were to sneak inside your closets, what do you think would surprise us most?

Cowan: People would be surprised by the different array of gold chains I own. There's quite a large selection. But there's also embarrassing shit. I buy shit I never intend on wearing just because I think it's awesome. If you go in my wardrobe now — I came to England in March and then they shut the borders to America so I couldn't come back — I got a closet that is two weeks' worth of clothes from L.A. So, it's winter in England and all I got are shorts.

Nas, the 2019 Video Music Awards solidified your status as a fashion icon. You channeled Prince in such a beautiful way.

Nas: Yeah. That was the moment people started paying attention to what I was wearing. Definitely.

Cowan: I think the look was so iconic because (a) it was fabulous and Nas looked amazing in it. But also, I think people live for Prince and we all miss Prince, and to bring that energy back.... Prince is loved by everyone.

How have your friendship and creative ventures together evolved since that time?
Cowan: Nas is quite similar to me. I'm not a texter. I drop in every now and then, and then there's a lull, or a funny thing [happens], and then we talk about something else. I'm a very sporadic friend. I disappear for quite some time. I think that's just something with busy people. But then the other problem was, during all of this, I was stuck in the U.K., so I couldn't be there. This [collaboration] has all been through Facetime and Zoom and all that shit, so it's been kind of, I don't know, digital.

How have y'all been handling digital collaborations amid lockdown?
Nas: It hasn't been too bad for me. It could have been worse. You can do things in the comfort of your own home, so that's great.
Cowan: Well, I'm legit wearing a top and boxers right now. Life is great! I'm super comfy.

Shop this collection at christiancowan.com. Learn more about The Loveland Foundation at thelovelandfoundation.org.

> "For a long time, I was a people pleaser. I wanted to make sure everybody was comfortable. But, you know, I'm getting rid of that..."
> — Lil Nas X

Opposite (from left): Helena Christensen, Khadijha Red Thunder, Gus Kenworthy, Jari Jones. This page: Isis King, Nas, and Amanda Lepore. All models are adorned in Christian Cowan's Spring 2021 collection, which Nas also helped visualize.

THE 26TH ANNUAL

Out

100

BY DAVID ARTAVIA, JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL, DESIRÉE GUERRERO, DONALD PADGETT, MEY RUDE, DANIEL REYNOLDS, TRUDY RING, JEFFREY MASTERS, TAYLOR HENDERSON, DEAN FRYN, JAVY RODRIGUEZ, JOHN CASEY, TRACY E. GILCRHIST, NEAL BROVERMAN, JACOB OGLES, AND DIANE ANDERSON-MINSHALL.

WILSON CRUZ

Actor & Stargazer

Wilson Cruz is fresh off a Zoom call with the cast of the 1990s cult hit *My So-Called Life*. "They're part of my chosen family," he explains of his costars. The Gen-X cast (including Claire Danes and Jared Leto) and particularly Wilson's character, Rickie, continue to resonate with fans a quarter of a century after he became the first out gay actor to play an out gay leading character on TV (in the U.S. at least).

"The whole point of that role was so that people could see themselves and own how beautiful their lives could be," he says, adding that what he took from that role was literally his character's arc: "I'm enough just as I am. I spent so much time, if you want to get honest, trying to make up for what I thought was broken as a teenager, to please people and make up for the shame that I was carrying around about being a gay boy."

Now, Cruz has brought Ricky's lesson — and the self confidence the veteran actor personally gained over the years appearing on dozens of TV shows (including *Noah's Arc*) and serving a leadership role at GLAAD — to Dr. Hugh Culber on the queerest *Star Trek* yet. (Trans actor Ian Alexander and nonbinary artist Blu del Barrio join queers Cruz, Tig Notaro, and showrunner Michele Paradise.)

The Black, gay, Latinx activist can't help but compare the *Star Trek: Discovery* universe, 1,000 years in the future, with America today. "I have to tell you — and it's going to sound corny — it's about how *Star Trek* makes me look at the world. Because in order for any of us to play these roles as people of color on this show, we have to imagine who we would be and what our lives would be if we were allowed to live up to our potential because we aren't dealing with all of the 'isms' that are obstacles in our lives."

After spending all day in that world, Cruz says, "You leave work wanting to figure out ways to make our world a bit closer to that one."

After reading the book *Caste*, what he realized "is that we've done this to ourselves. Nobody did this to us. We chose to dismiss the humanity of other members of our own species. We've chosen to do that. And we have to find a way to *un*-choose that."

The challenge for Cruz on the third season of *Discovery* "has been to imagine what it would be like to have literally a second lease on life. When you're given a second chance, I think, you say, what wasn't working before? How can I live and create the kind of life that I always wanted now that I've been given a chance to do it?"

For Dr. Culber, that involves stepping into a leadership role and caring for the crew, especially in moments of crisis. It's a blend of strength and empathy that Cruz wishes we saw more of in the Trump administration. "We need to be able to be strong because we have to be resilient... [but] the only way that we're resilient is if we're vulnerable as well."

After the second presidential debate, Cruz tweeted that Trump was "a white supremacist who has no empathy for over 200,000 dead or the children he's locked up. 500 whose parents are lost forever."

The reality of that still chokes him up. "There are 500 kids at the border right now who will never see their parents again." He pauses to let that sink in. "Someone said yesterday, 'I'm not a parent, but I've taken care of my nieces and nephews. If I have lost one of them for 10 minutes, *for 10 minutes*, I would be uncontrollable, inconsolable.' What world are we living in where we allow 500 children to go without their families? In the name of what?"

Cruz is hopeful that the past four years, and those children's trauma, haven't been in vain. "I hope that...we better understand how connected we are and how much we need each other. That we spent so much time and so much wasted energy on the ways that we're different and divided. That we could have used that energy to find common ground and get to work on these issues that have kept us apart for the entire history of our country."

He hopes his legacy will also be part of that healing, one in which he used "whatever talent and ability I had to tell the story of my community so that people would see us for the life-affirming, love-expanding community that we are, as opposed to the decades of misinformation and lies that were told about us."

He admits he uses television "to invite people in so they actually know us. And if they know us, they'll understand us. And if they can understand, they'll accept us and celebrate us. And that's all any of us want." —DIANE ANDERSON-MINSHALL

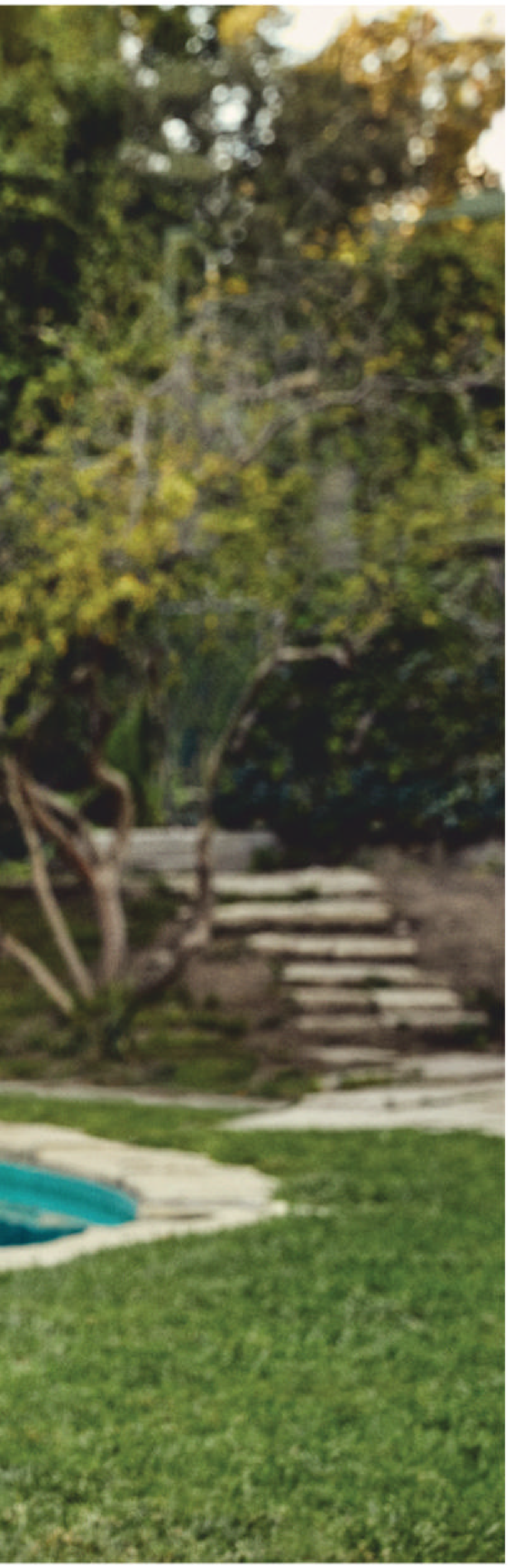
Photography by
The Riker Brothers @rikerbrothers

Photography by Danielle Levitt @daniellelevitt
Styled by Sean Knight @seanknight
Hair: Vernon Francois at The Visionaries Agency @vernonfrancois
Makeup: Jessica Smalls at The Wall Group @jessicasmalls
Prop stylist: Carl Hopgood at Celestine Agency @carlhopgood
Nails: Sreynin Peng @sreyninpeng
Production: The Pull Inc @thepullinc

Earrings: Alison Lou
Coat: Helmut Lang
Hat: Stetson
Shoes: Kenneth Cole

JANELLE MONÁE

Artist, Activist & Icon



"The table 'bout to turn," Janelle Monáe decrees in her recent anthem "Turntables." The video features Monáe clad in '40s neo-military garb while archival images of civil rights battles converge with modern-day Black Lives Matter protests, illuminating the through-line from the past to the present. History repeats, but in "Turntables," Monáe declares, "We kicking out the old regime."

At a time when so many artists were sidelined, Monáe's timely projects kept coming. In May, she starred in the acclaimed second season of *Homecoming* as a queer military veteran caught up in a sinister deal between big pharma and the U.S. government. The modern horror *Antebellum* (released in September) starred Monáe as an empowerment author terrorized by America's continued refusal to reckon with its roots in white supremacy. She also appeared as the legendary activist Dorothy Pitman Hughes in *The Glorias*.

But it was in early February, just before 2020 went sideways, when Monáe set a mood.

"I'm so proud to stand here as a Black queer artist telling stories," Monáe said on the Academy Awards' stage. She was in the middle of singing "Come Alive," from 2010's *The ArchAndroid* when she made the declaration. She'd already captivated the audience when she entered, donning a cardigan reminiscent of Fred Rogers and singing the theme song from his beloved kids' show, before launching into a meteoric rendition of Elton John's "I'm Still Standing" with *Pose*'s Billy Porter.

The five-minute-plus performance was a masterclass in artistry and empathy. She shouted out to Black History Month, the queer community, and women directors the Academy voters snubbed. But as Monáe tells it, "I don't think I did anything super unique."

"[There are] so many people who have graced stages, who are out protesting and who are fighting to have their voices heard. I just happened to have a mic," Monáe says. "To get on that stage and do anything other than that, would not have felt right to my spirit."

While the pandemic pressed pause, Monáe's finely-crafted, perfectly-timed, culturally-essential projects kept the world turning. "We are in the middle of watching tables turn, boomerangs booming back, and the rooster coming home to roost," she says. "White supremacy and racism, and those who abuse their power, we're seeing the people tearing it down...to see something new. 'Turntables' is just adding energy to the movement. There's a lot of fatigue emotionally around protesting, around going online and asking people to vote, or asking people to sign a petition. There's fatigue that happens, but we're not giving up."

To fight that fatigue, Monáe would like the narrative about Black experiences to include more joy. She's ready for stories that have yet to be told.

"My hope is that we can continue to showcase the spectrum of storytelling around Black voices and around Black human beings, stories that humanize us. We can go beyond trauma, showing how powerful we are as Black people to persevere through trauma. I'm ready to see us in the past, the present, the future truly experiencing joy on screen and what it means to just exist."

While Monáe proclaimed her identity as a "Black queer artist" on the Oscars' stage earlier this year, she first gave an interview about her identity in 2018.

"I knew because of my art, I would have to talk about these things," she says. "So that put more pressure on me. The most important thing was me having conversations with my family. It was important that my family be reintroduced, not to the little girl they grew up knowing that they called 'pumpkin' or they knew was into this or into that, but they knew who I was today — that they knew that I was a free-ass motherfucker."

Still, not all subjects are up for public scrutiny. "I don't talk about who I'm dating. That's not anybody's business," she says. "There are certain things that I feel artists, human beings should not feel pressured to talk about."

That notion of respecting a person's public and private life extends to others, and Monáe would like to see us moving away from a focus on public announcements of personal truths. "[Something] I identify with more than ever is the concept of coming in — and people coming *into* your life — and not coming out. I think there's so much pressure put on people that can't afford to announce to the world that, 'I am queer' or 'I'm gay.'"

Monáe hopes that when people "talk about their sexuality and being queer, being gay, or being who they are, they can talk about it, not out of fear, but out of love and celebration for who they are. If people look at me as that beacon of hope, that's great, but I always tell people don't feel any pressure to be me. Take your time."

— TRACY E. GILCHRIST

JANAYA KHAN

Activist & Organizer

As cofounder of Black Lives Matter Canada, a program director for racial justice organization Color of Change, and speaker for the Keppler Speakers Bureau, Janaya "Future" Khan has emerged as one of today's most influential leaders of the Black liberation movement.

In an essay Khan recently penned for *Time*, the queer, nonbinary artist and author writes, "Activism is being for someone else who you needed most in your most vulnerable moment." Khan reflects on a difficult period in their own life when they witnessed the power of this concept in action.

"I didn't know that it was activism.I only knew that it was care. I only knew that it was kindness," Khan says of a time in their early teens when they and their family resided in a women's shelter. They explain how the women there would go out of their way to protect and support them — even pretending to be "aunties" when answering the shelter phone to help Khan and their sister avoid embarrassment.

"At a certain point, those women caught on," says the Toronto native who's now based in Los Angeles. "They started to call themselves our aunties as well.... A lot of them were fleeing domestic abuse, dealing with poverty, and many other societal elements and ills — and here they are carving out time for this 13-year-old that needed more care. Taking me with them to the store for walks, just to give me a little talking to, just to give me a little bit more attention.... So that fundamentally rearranged how I saw people showing up for each other. These were poor women, white women, Black women, East Asian women.... This house was full of people who had been left behind — and refused to leave anyone else behind as a result. And that stayed with me; it taught me what advocacy could look like."

Khan, who is married to BLM cofounder Patrisse Cullors, has an amazing gift for speaking — and somehow manages to inject an inspiring dose of Zen positivity into a movement packed with trauma and pain. In addition to their ability to uplift folx at the darkest of times, Khan is also masterful at explaining abstract ideas and complex systems in terms anyone can understand. To illustrate this point, just check out Khan's YouTube video on defunding the police, in which they break down the problems with our current law enforcement and prison systems — and gives concrete solutions for changing them — in about two and a half minutes.

Khan has also been vocal about their queer, nonbinary identity and their thoughts on coming out or exactly what being "out" entails.

"Saying I'm queer, I'm trans, nonbinary, sure, is a part of it," Khan says. "But really, what it is, is I am no longer going to live in fear. I'm going to live in power.... And I think that's what we need more people to understand, really, everyone, is that it's time for everyone to come across."

Khan, who is also an amateur competitive boxer as well as a burgeoning fashion muse, thanks to their effortlessly cool style sense, explains how our personal identities are directly connected to the state of the world. Our strength as individuals has a direct correlation to the dismantling of evil and unjust systems, Khan says.

"Identity can and should be an entry point into movement," they say. "I understand that Black liberation, for example, is integral to the liberation of all people. And so I believe that identity can actually be our entry point into movements, but it shouldn't be our exit point. I believe that our exit point should be informed by shared values and by our belief system — because we're not fighting an administration.... What we're fighting is a belief system.

"When you look at some of the legislation that's being used to attack trans people and particularly trans women, it's the same language that was used to keep Black people out of public spaces [during segregation].... They really don't have to recreate new ways to oppress us; they just recycle them."

Though Khan admits that 2020 has certainly been difficult and exhausting for activists, they say the progress made keeps them motivated and focused on the ultimate goal.

"At varying times throughout the day, everything feels possible," Khan says. "And then at other times, winning seems impossible in our lifetime . And then I remind myself, at the risk of losing myself again, that losing this fight is so much greater than any risk that's presented by this administration, by the ilk...."

Khan doesn't plan to stop anytime soon.

"We fought so hard to be here, especially as the queer and trans community, and I'll be damned if we lose ground because some people have temporarily out-resourced us."

—DESIRÉE GUERRERO

Photography by Nabil Elderkin
@nabil

Photography by Luke Fontana @lukefontana
Hair by Adrien Alcantar @adrianalcantar_
Styled by Max Cadillac @itsmaxcadillac

Suit: Topman
Shirt/Shoes: Joe's own
Watch: Tom Ford
Sunglasses: Raen

JOE MANTELLO

Actor & Director

It's a typical Hollywood story. A bright-eyed young man from Rockford, Ill., makes it to Los Angeles with high hopes, big dreams, and the talent to take him all the way to the top. Not everyone can say they've had two huge blockbusters in a single summer, but if you know Joe Mantello's backstory, you'll know the actor and director is no overnight success.

Mantello's body of work in theater over the last two decades is nothing short of legendary. His award-winning performance as Louis Ironson in the original Broadway cast of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, a two-part play about HIV in 1980s New York City, is still revered and discussed in acting classes across the country. Of course, acting in the play was a prelude to what ultimately became a long and rewarding directing career.

The director's résumé includes the original Broadway productions of Terrence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, the smash musicals *Wicked* and *9 to 5*, the film adaptation of Larry Kramer's play *The Normal Heart*, in which he also starred on Broadway, and much more.

This year, Mantello entered the world of television, which he admits is still "unknown territory," in a big way, giving a breathtaking performance in Ryan Murphy's *Hollywood* as a closeted gay studio executive who slowly comes to terms with his sexuality. He also directed Netflix's film of Mart Crowley's groundbreaking play *The Boys in the Band*, about a group of gay and bisexual men who gather for a birthday party where bitchy quips explode and emotions collide. The film stars the original cast of the 2018 Broadway revival, which Mantello also directed.

Even as a young actor, Mantello had a director's eye. "I don't know that I would have called it that at the time," he reflects. "There was always this sensibility that was outside of myself, that was looking at the whole and concerned about the whole, which was not my job." Still, for the sake of professionalism, he chose to keep his "silent opinions" about costumes and sets to himself.

Great directors like George C. Wolfe, who directed both parts of *Angels in America*, were more receptive to Mantello's opinions than others. "I think we're very different directors," he says of Wolfe, who encouraged him to take the leap into directing, "but there were certain things he did, that he gave to us as actors, that were significant and meaningful. I've carried them with me." Still, Hollywood is a long way from Manhattan, and its audience is exponentially larger than that of a tight black-box theater. It felt too far-reaching for the New York theater artist. That is, until Ryan Murphy offered him his role in *Hollywood*.

"I was a little baffled by it," he says humbly. "But you know, when you're around Ryan long enough, you learn to trust his instincts. He's got an impeccable eye. The main reason I did it was because he thought I could do it. That's an incredible gift for someone to give you."

Working on a long-form miniseries is different from working on a film or episodic television, which Mantello quickly learned. "We didn't have an arc of a season to look to, and so in the early scripts, I was really kind of thrown and I just kept saying to [Murphy], 'I think you've got the wrong person. I don't know how to do this. Let me give you the names of people who would do better,'" he quips. "And because he said, 'No, no, no. I'm writing this for you' and 'There is an arc to it' and 'You're going to get there, but you have to trust me. Where we're starting may be uncomfortable for you, but I know where I'm taking it.' Then he said the Carrie Fisher quote: 'Instant gratification takes too long.' Then I was like, *OK*. I trusted him."

Without a doubt, Mantello, a lapsed Catholic, seems to always find himself in the right place at the right time. His curiosity and moral compass have placed him alongside some of the most groundbreaking artists of the 20th century, including McNally and Crowley, both of whom died this year. He smiles remembering the night he witnessed Crowley accept the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play for *The Boys in the Band*, a work that over the course of 50 years has divided the LGBTQ+ community over its portrayal of gay people. For the director, it was a reminder "to not get caught up" in what society's initial response is, adding that "we live in a world where everyone feels compelled to have an immediate response. That doesn't take into account humility."

As out LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood solidify their place in front of and behind the camera, Mantello once again is right where he belongs.

"When you have a platform like Netflix that has an international reach, you offer a story like *The Boys in the Band* to people who live in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles," he says. "If you live in a country or come from a religious community that still has issues [with accepting LGBTQ+ people], the story has an enormous impact on your real life. I know that when I was growing up, if I had seen nine out gay actors in a movie, it would have accelerated my own [coming-out] process.

— DAVID ARTAVIA

Together, Rising
Stronger
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THOMAS BEATTIE

Athlete & Entrepreneur

"Since coming out I have had the opportunity to speak publicly on the importance of LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion in professional football and sports at-large," says Thomas Beattie, who made history earlier this year when he became the second professional soccer player from the United Kingdom to come out. Since an injury forced him to retire, the brawny athlete has been living in Singapore, where he's created companies that span sectors from health to mobile technology, real estate development to e-commerce. "This year has been one of the most significant of my life so far," he says. "If we are ever going to tackle the issue of the closet in [soccer], we must address the institutional and systemic issues head on. I'm committed to being at the table and part of those conversations to help create change so no LGBTQ+ [soccer player] is forced to live their life in silence." @iamthomasbeattie

BILLY BEAN

Retired MLB Professional

Billy Bean has been hitting homeruns all his life. The only living out gay person to have played Major League Baseball retired in 1995 before returning to the game in 2014, when he was selected as the league's inaugural ambassador for inclusion. He's now vice president and special assistant to the Baseball Commissioner, working to make the league more welcoming for queer athletes. "I'm proud of MLB's unwavering commitment to supporting and promoting LGBTQ inclusion and acceptance," Bean says. "It's our mission to foster an equitable and fair workplace, free of discrimination and prejudice for every player, coach, umpire, employee, fan, and stakeholder. I appreciate the opportunity to impact our players through education, and it is inspiring to see them embrace their platform as influencers during this unprecedented year." @billybeanball

ERIN PARISI

Explorer and Highpointer

Erin Parisi is on a quest to be the first transgender woman to climb the Seven Summits, the name given to the highest peak on each continent. Summiting all seven is a brutal feat, first accomplished in 1985. Before she transitioned, Parisi bagged Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro. Now she's reconquering the mountain once again. Next up is the dangerous Himalayan peak of Mt. Everest. She'll be climbing not just to reach the top but also to inspire others within the trans community to conquer their own personal summits. "We empower ourselves to live and write our best stories when we find the courage to stop running from and fearing ourselves," Parisi says to other trans people with big dreams. "Stand high and be proud of your voice." (transending7.org)

QUINN

Soccer Player

Quinn is the type of player you want on your team. Tough. Smart. Unyielding in pursuit of victory. So rather than accept the lack of trans visibility in their sport of soccer, they came out this year "to increase representation of trans athletes in sports and to further engage in trans advocacy." They also saw the need to provide identifiable role models for young trans athletes. "Growing up," they say, "I didn't see someone who identified as I did in the career that I wanted to pursue and so I hope through my representation young folks can feel a little more hopeful about pursuing the sports that they love" despite the many barriers that still exist. The International Olympic Organizing Committee has yet to make a ruling on the inclusion of trans athletes in the Olympics, so Quinn is in limbo for the upcoming Tokyo Summer Olympics. They played in the 2016 Olympics and helped the Canadian National Team qualify for the Tokyo games. Regardless of the IOCC's decision, Quinn is a champion. @thequinny5

COURTESY (BEATTIE, QUINN); COURTESY MLB (BEAN); WYNN WILEY (PARISI)

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DENNIS DEAN IMAGES

RICHARD GRAY

Senior VP, Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion for Greater Fort Lauderdale

Richard Gray's biggest accomplishment this year was supposed to be pulling off the first-ever Pride of the Americas, a five-day celebration expected to bring 300,000 visitors from two continents and 53 nations to Greater Fort Lauderdale, Fla.'s beaches — before it had to be postponed in the face of a global pandemic.

"It is such a pivotal time for travel," Gray acknowledges. But in that he sees "a great opportunity to satisfy this pent-up demand for wanderlust." When travelers are ready to return, he's determined his city will be ready and able to welcome "everyone under the sun."

Gray, who identifies as gay, leads the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion department. "Inclusion means that all individuals are respected, accepted, and valued," he explains. "Diversity means recognizing and respecting everyone's unique qualities and attributes. Diversity in the business environment is about more than gender, race, and ethnicity. It has evolved, and it now includes employees with diverse religious and political beliefs, different socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientation, culture, people of size, and people with disabilities."

In helping the bureau launch the world's first global marketing and mainstream advertising campaign featuring transgender models (in 2016), Gray established himself as a visionary in the travel industry. And the bureau continues to innovate, unveiling ads earlier this year featuring disabled, plus-size, and older models.

The agency's latest campaign, "Celebrate You," is another global first. "It is our best campaign to date and underscores Greater Fort Lauderdale's diverse community and welcoming vibe," he says. "In this campaign, we include trans, drag, lesbian, gay, nonbinary, disabled, straight, and minorities in a very nonresort way. These are locals that live here, and they are not models. It is truly a historic, inclusive, and diverse global campaign."

As part of this campaign, the bureau added hues representing people of color to its Pride colors "to show our commitment to and belief in Black and brown people." It is the first destination marketing organization to add these colors to the flag. "The icing on the cake for me has been to see the impact my work has had on the global LGBT+ community," Gray says. "You can't be invisible. Visibility creates awareness and awareness leads to acceptance and acceptance ends discrimination. It's essential for all of us to use our own personal platforms to speak out. We are not free until we are all free." @rwbgray

KIM CULMONE

Senior VP & Head of Design for Barbie and Fashion Dolls, Mattel

Kim Culmone oversees all aspects of product design for some of the world's most iconic toys. "I loved Barbie growing up, and little did I know that I would one day be head of design for a doll that was so important and influential in my life," Culmone says. "She was and is a source of endless inspiration to me, as she is for many in the fashion and design community. Barbie is literally a tool for imagination that transports you, dreaming of who to be and how you want to live your best life. Or at least she was for this only child from New Orleans."

For Culmone, it's important that diversity is found on the doll aisle, and over the past five years, she has helped the line evolve to be more reflective of the world by introducing more than 170 new looks, including expansive skin tones, new hair colors and textures, various eye colors, body diversity, and dolls reflecting permanent disabilities.

Outside of the Barbie world, Culmone serves on the board of directors for the Wright Institute Los Angeles, a mental health nonprofit organization, and Chickenshed NYC, a nonprofit inclusive children's theater company. 🐦@kculmone

KARL
LAGERFELD
MOSCHINO
creatable WORLD

TERI WEBER

BRANDON D. ANDERSON

Activist and Tech Developer

After Brandon D. Anderson's partner was killed by a police officer during a routine traffic stop, Anderson discovered that the officer had a history of physical abuse, particularly during traffic stops — abuse that was never reported. Each of the 18,000 police departments in the U.S. has its own unique, often complicated process of reporting misconduct, and as a result, fewer than 5 percent of people report police violence when it occurs. "This leads to a lack of transparency about officer behavior and, more importantly, dangerously shortsighted policies governing our safety, as it is hard to write comprehensive policies meant to fix experiences that are never documented," Anderson says.

So Anderson created Raheem, a tech company working to hold officers and their departments accountable by making it easier to report police violence. Raheem helps people file complaints, find a free lawyer, and publicize their stories. Raheem's research is already being used in cities across the country, and Anderson points out that things are changing.

"This year, at least 13 cities are defunding their police departments, including New York City, Austin, Los Angeles, and Baltimore, mostly due to the defund the police movement, which has sparked the largest protest in world history," he says. Reports can currently be submitted on Raheem.org. A mobile app, the first for reporting and livestreaming police violence, is on the way. @raheem_org

CHIUN-KAI SHIH

Creative Director, CKS

After 20-plus years as a photographer and editor at Condé Nast, Chiun-Kai Shih was ready for a new challenge. "While working with rising stars behind the camera, I discovered I was even better suited to create opportunities for them," he says. "That was my inspiration for launching my company, CKS Creative Management Inc., in 2014."

CKS connects celebrities, talent, fashion designers, and more with Asian clients in their field, creating "business ventures, joint collaborations, and intellectual property development" for an often overlooked group. "This company has allowed me to help individuals attain their dreams by utilizing my expertise in branding and international marketing," Shih says.

Despite the pandemic, Shih maintains an optimistic worldview and continues "to see the demand for business collaboration as the Asian and Western entertainment continues to have broader crossover appeal."

Throughout his own work and personal life, Shih knows the value of gratitude, community, and giving back. He's currently working with Rainbow Railroad, an organization that helps LGBTQ+ people escape state-sponsored violence. "They focus on providing solutions and resources for LGBTQI people who need immediate assistance, facing a serious threat to their lives and safety because of their sexuality," he says. "Getting involved with Rainbow Railroad's critical mission has been so rewarding." @mrchunkyexpress

GIONCARLO VALENTINE (ANDERSON); NICK ONKEN (SHIH)

MICHAELA MENDELSOHN

CEO, Pollo West Corp.

Back in 1986, Michaela Mendelsohn founded Pollo West Corp., which now operates six fast-casual chicken restaurants in the Los Angeles area. Admittedly, 2020 has been a tough year, but "a focus on drive-through, takeout, and delivery helped us make a comeback," she says. "We have also added patio dining to all of our stores, so customers have a safe way to dine out."

Mendelsohn, who was the first transgender board member for the Trevor Project, says her nonprofit work hasn't seen the same kind of bounce. After recognizing an opportunity as a business owner to hire other trans people, she founded Trans Can Work to develop opportunities for prospective gender-diverse workers. But she acknowledges that now a "considerable amount of our time is spent helping our job-seeker clients through the emotional and physical difficulties they are experiencing during the pandemic. We continue to help our clients become job-ready and are now placing them in industries that are still hiring. Competition for jobs is fiercer now, however. Funding is also a challenge for us during a time when so many people are struggling."

Through a new partnership with the Human Rights Campaign, Trans Can Work is helping to increase diverse hiring nationwide with a series of regional job fairs — the next happening in Dallas in early 2021. The organization is also partnering with the city of West Hollywood this year to create an anti-transphobia campaign aimed at breaking down the numerous barriers trans people face when seeking employment. Plus, "going virtual has helped us reach more people nationwide," she says. "Our gender-diverse community is an intersection of all colors and ethnicities. We hope this new spotlight will increase and create real and lasting change." @MichaelaSpeaks

VALERIE BERLIN

Cofounder and Principal of BerlinRosen

Having founded BerlinRosen, a strategic communications firm, with Jonathan Rosen 15 years ago, Valerie Berlin has elevated marginalized voices through targeted campaigns, initiatives, and elections across many intersections, including racial and criminal justice, women's health, and immigration reform. This year, BerlinRosen played an integral role in supporting Democratic candidates like Pete Buttigieg, helping recruit 500,000 new poll workers ahead of the election through its work with the nonpartisan initiative Power the Polls, shaping the national communication strategy for the multiyear Flint water crisis litigation, and much more.

"I've learned a ton in this moment about resilience, creativity, and humor," she says. "First, people are incredibly resilient — in spite of everything, our team shows up, gives their all, and supports each other, and the outpouring of compassion in the face of evil is sustaining. Secondly, crises force us to be creative. If someone told me a year ago that we couldn't leave our homes and will need to do our work from 200 separate locations, I would have said it couldn't be done. But here we are, doing it, and finding new ways for clients to reach their audiences, tell their stories, and move their issues forward, all while being there for one another in this isolating environment."

As for what lies ahead in the communications industry overall, she says it's never been more important to meet people where they are. "Communicators need to be versatile, well-rounded pros who know how to tell stories across every platform — from *The New York Times* to an individual journalist's Substack account to a niche podcast to an Instagram Live with a celebrity in another field," she says. "We need to look everywhere to tell stories and tell them well." Of course, one should always make time for a laugh. "Without finding something to laugh about amidst all the pain, I don't know how we would survive. Thank the lord for Sarah Cooper videos!" @ValerieBerlin

AFUPRODUCTIONS.COM (MENDELSOHN); CEOPORTRAIT (BERLIN)

MARK PASNIK

Architect and Activist

When asked to describe himself, Mark Pasnik is humble. "I like to think of myself as having several interconnected roles — as an architect, educator, and advocate who champions the voices and legacy of other eras."

In truth, Pasnik, who is gay, is also an expert and published author on brutalism, the "legacy of concrete modernist buildings," as he defines the term. He cites Boston's City Hall as "one of the most widely recognized" examples of the type of now-vilified structures "once celebrated for their bravado." In his role as chair of the Boston Art Commission, Pasnik has been reminded of the "value of meaningful public discourse in communicating across divides." Earlier this year, the commision unamiously voted to remove the Emancipation Memorial in Park Square that depicted a freed American Black slave kneeling before Abraham Lincoln. He and others have implemented such discourse to address larger issues facing an increasingly polarized society suffering the effects of systemic oppression, which are often represented in historic statues that are out of step with today's ethos. "I have been learning from many voices in Boston's communities about symbolism and racial justice in public art," he says.

Despite the current cultural divide, Pasnik remains hopeful for the future and the positive impact architecture can have in effecting change. "Architecture is a particularly fascinating art form because it records ideas from one era and transmits them across decades. Advocating for works of architecture means understanding those messages and sharing their lessons with new generations." (Boston.gov)

TIM COOK

CEO, Apple

Despite its stress and strife, 2020 was the year when people turned to their devices for connection. It turned out to be a good year for Apple CEO Tim Cook. In June, the leading tech company hit a historic high when its market value reached $1.5 trillion only two years after first hitting the trillion-dollar mark. A couple of months later, Apple's market value surpassed the $2 trillion mark. Talk about progress. Cook, the first chief executive of a Fortune 500 company to publicly come out as gay, has doubled the company's revenue and profit and increased its market value from $348 billion to $1.9 trillion since taking the reins in 2011. In the process, he became a billionaire and one of the richest gay men on the planet.

@tim_cook

SAM ROSENHOLTZ PHOTOGRAPHY (PASNIK); PIETRO D'APRANO VIA WIREIMAGE (COOK)

DIEGO MONTOYA

Designer and Visionary

A testament to how much the mainstream is embracing queer artistry, Diego Montoya's opulent and ornate looks were all over our TVs this year. Thanks to *RuPaul's Drag Race* taking the art form to the world stage, the Peruvian-born, New York City-based designer has made a name for himself as a go-to for many of the biggest names to come out of the show.

For many, Montoya first landed on the collective radar when he created the unforgettable white dress that Sasha Velour wore during her winning final lip-synch to Whitney Houston's "It's Not Right But It's Okay" against Peppermint in season 9 of *Drag Race*. Last year, he made history when Shangela became the first drag queen to walk the Oscars red carpet in drag wearing his lavender and gold design. "I love that people are paying drag queens, finally, because this has been a very underpaid thing even though it's a very expensive thing to do," he says. "Now the girls are being able to have big costumes made and plan big shows, and there's a market for that because they've been seen by the world."

As a costume designer on the HBO's *We're Here,* starring Shangela, Bob the Drag Queen, and Eureka O'Hara, Montoya helped spread the gospel of drag to residents in small town America who received drag makeovers — making us ugly cry in the process.

Although the finale of season 5 of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars* saw Shea Couleé walk away with the crown, it was also a winning moment for Montoya. Contestants Jujubee, Miz Cracker, and Blair St. Clair each took to the final runway wearing his designs in looks that were among the most exciting to ever appear on the long-running show.

It's no surprise that when Lady Gaga needed a mask for her performance at this year's MTV Video Music Awards, her team sought out Montoya. For the socially distanced telecast held amid the ongoing global pandemic, the pop star wore a variety of masks to make her stance clear: *Wear a mask*. With Gaga committing to covering her face even during her performance, Montoya was tasked with making a mask that was just as functional for singing live as it was beautiful.

"I'm proud of that collaboration because it was fast and it was demanding, but it looked great onstage," Montoya says. "The message that she was trying to convey with that performance really worked and was spot on."

"If I look back, I can't believe I get to just make costumes all day long. And there's enough of a demand for these costumes that are unusual and opportunities to work on just that all the time." @diegomontoyastudio

COLIN GRAY (TALEY); RICARDO HORATION NELSON (MONTOYA)

ANDRÉ LEON TALLEY

Fashion Editor, Author, and Visionary

With a career that spans more than 50 years, André Leon Talley is one of the most influential forces in fashion. Period. 2020 was an eventful year for the industry icon, who's never one to be boring. The former editor at large and creative director of *Vogue* released a second memoir (and third book), *The Chiffon Trenches*, which focuses on his experiences and insights from five decades immersed in the worlds of art and fashion. He also writes candidly of his relationship with longtime *Vogue* editor in chief Anna Wintour.

Talley, who has been vocal about racism within the industry and has historically advocated for Black women in fashion, recently defended Wintour when a *New York Times* article criticized her for being complicit in systemic racism: "Anna made history by making me the first African American male EVER to be named as creative director of *Vogue*, in 1988. She crashed the glass ceiling," he wrote on Instagram.

Talley's unique expertise and points of view continue to inspire writers, creators, and connoisseurs at all intersections of art. "You must always share your knowledge with people, especially the future generations," he says. @officialALT

RACHEL MADDOW

Journalist

When you get right down to it, the year 2020 made no sense — absolutely no sense — because there was never any time to stop and think about it. You couldn't keep your balance between all of the earthquakes of news, each with their own aftershocks: impeachment, COVID-19, lockdowns, unemployment, retail bankruptcies, George Floyd, racial unrest, nightly protests, COVID-19, hurricanes, record fires, climate change, Trump's taxes, Trump's lies, Trump's minions, Trump's COVID-19, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Amy Coney Barrett (just to name a few). Oh, and as icing on this moldy cake of a year, there was a presidential election.

In a world gone mad, in a surreal environment of utter chaos, confusion, and conflict, if you turned your TV on to MSNBC at 9 Eastern each night, there was someone on your screen who could make sense out of all the bewildering news. Although she's had her own show in this time slot for 12 years now, Rachel Maddow was needed more than ever in 2020.

You didn't have to be queer to appreciate this lesbian's calm, collected, careful manner and the way she prosecuted her case each night, with steely deliberation, point-by-point clarifications backed up by painstaking research, and a laser focus on telling the truth. From 9 p.m. to 9:20 p.m., her opening monologue, well, opening statement in this case, cut through all the insanity, the instability, and the incompetence. Each night during this turbulent year, she provided a road map of clarity to America.

And she did it with what appeared to be natural conversations with her viewers. But that's not what happened. There was surely exhaustive effort on her part. She lived and breathed her show, and threw herself headfirst into the subjects and her script each night. How did she get it right all the time? Always zeroing in on her target and hitting a bull's-eye every time. (Did she ever sleep?) We all need a rest and a slow news year in 2021. And no one needs that more than Rachel Maddow. @maddowshow

TAYLOR MILLER (GELWICKS); AMANDA EDWARDS FOR WIRE IMAGE (MADDOW)

ANDREW GELWICKS

Activist and Author

It was little surprise when Andrew Gelwicks, a gay former Condé Nast editor, became a celebrity stylist. "Working in the fashion department at *GQ* and doing celebrity booking at *Teen Vogue* laid the foundation for me to venture into celebrity styling," he says. "The exposure was vast, and I was fortunate to learn from some of the most brilliant, accomplished editors. However, I had long been enamored by iconic editorials and red carpet moments that live on in perpetuity. I moved on to be a part of that." Today, the 26-year-old counts Catherine O'Hara and Lisa Rinna among his clients, and on top of his many accomplishments in publishing and fashion, his first book, *The Queer Advantage: Conversations With LGBTQ+ Leaders on the Power of Identity*, hit shelves in October. *The Queer Advantage* is a collection of firsthand stories of renowned LGBTQ+ trailblazers (including Dan Levy, George Takei, Billie Jean King, Margaret Cho, Lee Daniels, Adam Rippon, Boy George, Troye Sivan, and more). It explores how their queer identities have positively impacted their lives and careers, offering an intimate celebration of queerness still too rare today.

"I connected most with the creatives and artists I interviewed in *The Queer Advantage*," Gelwicks admits. "At the same time, I felt an innate bond with all 51 leaders. While each of their experiences were so gloriously unique, the shared understanding of being able to use what society defines as a weakness as your superpower resonated with me deeply. There is something for everybody, regardless of how you identify, within the pages. It has been a thrill working with innovative queer leaders from around the globe and helping to amplify their powerful stories."

From fashion to writing to public speaking, Gelwicks has blended his professional passions together, and the turbulent year we've had has given him "an opportunity to reflect on my goals, what makes me most happy, and the change I wish to see in the world." The book, which could change how young people and their families see LGBTQ+ people, changed Gelwicks even more. "For many years I actively tried to suppress memories of my own struggles related to understanding my identity," he says. "In writing this book, I was compelled to not only confront the past, but also to dissect, analyze, and ultimately embrace those moments. I would not give up that process for the world." @andrewgelwicks

COURTESY

JENNI OLSON

Filmmaker and Queer Historian

One of the world's leading experts on queer cinema history, Jenni Olson is an independent filmmaker and former co-director of the San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival. This year her extensive collection was acquired by the Harvard Film Archive, preserving hundreds of queer moving images from feature films, TV commercials, educational films, home movies, trailers, and more — and making them available to a wider audience.

Olson offers this summary of her work: "I am completely engaged in themes of memory and nostalgia and history but with the goal of helping the viewer (and myself) to arrive in the present moment. I am very sincere in this aim...to create a cinematic experience that approximates stopping time — I mean this in a very spiritual way. I really just want my viewers to pause and be in the moment."

The cofounder of the Bressan Project, Olson describes its restoration and re-release of works by pioneering gay filmmaker Arthur J. Bressan Jr. — including *Buddies* (1985, the first feature film about AIDS) and the 1977 documentary *Gay USA* — as "one of the most rewarding undertakings of my career."

Her latest book, *The Oxford Handbook of Queer Cinema*, is forthcoming in 2021, and she is in development on her third feature-length essay film, *The Quiet World*, and a memoir of the same name in which she reflects on growing up queer, butch, and gender-nonconforming in Minnesota. She says *Quiet* will "grapple with a diverse array of topics ranging from Prince to George Floyd to the brutal French colonial history of the state."

Reflecting on 2020, Olson muses, "Like a showdown in a classic Western, the pandemic cleared the main street of our proverbial frontier town for an encounter between the good guys and the bad guys (though often it has seemed the sheriff is the villain and the outlaw is our hero). The police murder of George Floyd brought on a level of collective societal consciousness-raising around systemic racism which I believe can never be erased despite the violent backlash from fearful conservatives and extremist white nationalists."

"To cite a line I wrote in *The Quiet World*, riffing on one of my favorite cis-het-white poets [T.S. Eliot]: 'May human voices wake us, lest we drown.'" @jenniolsonsf

SHARON-FRANKLIN BROWN

President of the Board of Christopher Street West/LA Pride

In September, Sharon-Franklin Brown made history when she became the first Black transgender woman elected president of the board of Christopher Street West/LA Pride, the 50-year-old organization that oversees one of the nation's largest Pride celebrations. And Brown doesn't take the role lightly.

"The job allows me the opportunity to give back to the community, which then echoes into dozens, if not hundreds, of smaller LGBTQ+ organizations and communities across the country," she says. Brown and her team are committed to establishing "safe spaces that are not only diverse, equitable, and inclusive but also create a sense of belonging for everyone," she adds. Brown is also chief human resources officer at the Los Angeles LGBT Center, where she oversees 800 employees in areas including organizational development and personnel policies. While the pandemic has changed how Pride and the workplace operate, she's observed a tangible shift toward inclusion in both.

"The time for change is now, and I am a part of that change," she says. "I've also been reminded [of] how resilient we are as a community. We are all trying to find creative ways to deal with the coronavirus pandemic as well as the attacks on LGBTQ+ civil liberties under the Trump administration. We will prevail." @lapride

PARIS BARCLAY

Director and Producer

In 2013, Paris Barclay became the first Black and the first gay president of the Directors Guild of America. Though he stepped down in 2017, his work toward creating a safer work environment and growing opportunities for artists of color has only expanded. Alongside director Steven Soderbergh, Barclay cochaired the "Return to Work" negotiations, in which major unions and producers determined a way to reopen film and TV production under new safety guidelines amid the pandemic. In short, he helped get Hollywood back to work.

"I have two families: the one I have at home with my husband and sons, and the one I have at work with the cast and crew of *Station 19*," he says of the *Grey's Anatomy* spin-off that showcases two leading LGBTQ+ characters. "Both have needed my focus to shift to making their safety a priority in the midst of this raging pandemic. I've learned that caring for them both is truly difficult, but a real source of joy."

The respected producer and director of nearly 200 episodes of television is also an ardent musical theater creator. Barclay has written 17 musical plays that have been produced around the country. He's hoping to bring one of them, *One Red Flower*, based on soldiers' letters written during the Vietnam War, to the small screen soon.

While Barclay says the days of "40 million people watching *ER*" are over, today's television offers a new opportunity to "tell particular stories, that highlight characters who don't get their chance to shine — transgender women and men, bisexual men, lesbian and gay Black people. We can tell their stories now, with depth and reality, in this increasingly fragmented landscape." @harparbar

BETSY MARTINEZ (BROWN); DUSTIN SNIPES (BARCLAY)

PUNKIE JOHNSON

Comedian and Writer

Saturday Night Live just got a hell of a lot funnier earlier this year when Punkie Johnson became the NBC staple's first Black lesbian cast member. The New Orleans native describes herself as a "brutally honest Southern lesbian." She joins other current LGBTQ+ cast members Bowen Yang and Kate McKinnon. She's been happily married to her wife for over 17 years and has used their relationship as part of her comedy sets, like at *Just for Laughs* when she made a relatable joke about how role-play saved her marriage. @punkiejohnson

COOLEST MOM
IN THE JUNGLE

DAMIEN NAVARRO

Executive Director, Outfest

Damien Navarro is the first gay Latino executive director of Outfest, a 40-year-old nonprofit that produces two annual world-class queer film festivals and several educational programs. Navarro's ability to excel on the creative and business side of movie making is probably why Outfest is thriving despite the global pandemic, hosting a festival and a drive-in series of screenings in Malibu, Calif.

"Our mission is to create visibility to diverse LGBTQIA+ stories and empower storytellers," he says. Building empathy to drive meaningful social change is more meaning now than ever." The flexibility Navarro has brought to the prominent organization had its genesis in his belief that Outfest's events should not be confined to a movie theater but can be shared across platforms and found spaces. Just as crucial was the creative space his leadership brought to normally marginalized voices, with more than 70 percent of the Outfest's slate directed by female, trans and POC filmmakers. @damiennavarro

ILONA VERLEY

Drag Race's Two-Spirit Queen

When Ilona Verley became the first Indigenous and two-spirit contestant to ever compete in the now-global *Drag Race* franchise as a part of *Canada's Drag Race*, she knew it was an opportunity. "It's really important to have that visibility because I went through years of thinking that I had to be white-passing to fit in and to make it in media, and that's not true," she says. Her exploration of gender continues to evolve. "I'm experiencing this very crazy fluidity right now," Verley says. "I don't want to put my foot down too much with any label. Because who knows, in a few months from now, when I'm in a better mind-set or a better situation, how I'm going to feel."

Verley, in her "head-to-toe monochromatic, pastel perfection," is one of the most exciting queens working today. Queens everywhere should be worried. "I do have my American citizenship, so look out bitches. As soon as that border is open, I'm coming. I'm taking all your gigs." @ilonaverley

JEFF KRAVITZ WITH FILMMAGIC FOR KLUSTERFEST (JOHNSON); ZOE URNESS (NAVARRO); FERNANDO CYSNEIROS (VERLEY)

SHEVRIN JONES

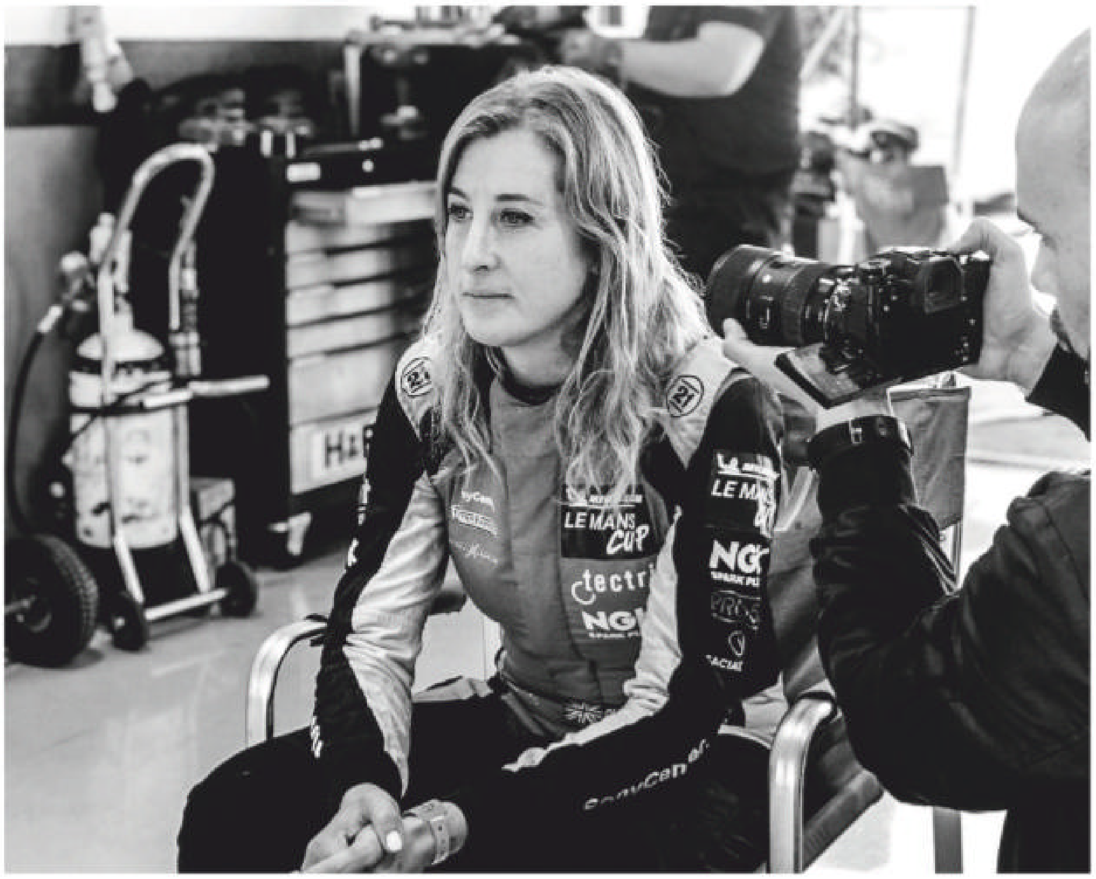
Florida Legislator

Shevrin Jones, a preacher's son, won election to Florida's House of Representatives in 2012. Eight years later, he became the first out gay member of the state Senate — and the chamber's first queer person of color. Looking back, making history proved easier than he realized. "I kept getting in my own way," says Jones, who represents a Democratic district populated by socially conservative Bahamian immigrants, including his own family. Now, one of 40 Senate desks in Florida's capital city of Tallahassee bears his nameplate. "People could care less about what you are doing in the bedroom," he says. "They're more concerned about what you are going to do for them." @shevrinjones

CHARLIE MARTIN

Auto Racer

Auto racing is not a sport for the faint of heart. For Charlie Martin, a transgender woman breaking barriers on and off the track, the race to inclusion in the sport has had its hairpin turns. So far, she has raced in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge, the Michelin Le Mans Cup, and the German VLN Championship, where she raced in the 2020 24 Hours of Nürburgring. She is the first out trans person to take on that challenge. Her ultimate racing goal, though, is to take part in the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the gold standard for endurance motor racing. "I'm using my platform in sport to educate people, increase acceptance and empathy for the trans community, and inspire positive change in the world," she says. @gocharliem



KIERRA JOHNSON

Executive Director, National LGBTQ Task Force

In September, Kierra Johnson was named the National LGBTQ Task Force's first Black executive director after it was announced that in 2021 Rea Carey would exit her long-held position. Johnson is one of just a few queer-identified women of color leading a national LGBTQ+ organization. "I am excited about our work to better articulate the impact of issues that people rarely think of as LGBTQ issues on people of our community," she says. "There is much work to be done to get the needed data and to tell the stories that are all too common and largely unheard of — nonbinary and trans people who are not being hired, queer young people living on the streets, and LGBTQ+ people of color [who] are targeted by the police. We are dying from diseases and ailments because our full humanity is often unrecognized, and it is entirely legal to refuse us quality, culturally competent care. This is the work I was born to do. This is the future of the Task Force." @kierradc

MY FLORIDA HOUSE (JONES); COURTESY SUBJECT (MARTIN); TODD FRANSON (JOHNSON)

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RITCHIE TORRES

U.S. Representative-Elect

Ritchie Torres is no stranger to breaking new ground. In 2013, at age 25, he won a seat in the New York City Council, making him the youngest elected official in the city and the first member of the LGBTQ+ community elected from the Bronx. Now Torres, who is gay, is poised to become the first Afro-Latinx person from the LGBTQ+ population to serve in Congress.

Torres is running for the U.S. House in New York's 15th Congressional District, and was practically assured a win in the most heavily Democratic district in the nation. But in the Democratic primary in June, he was one of a dozen candidates including homophobe and fellow City Council member Rubén Díaz Sr. Torres led the field with 32 percent of the vote. Torres, who grew up in public housing in the Bronx, is committed to fighting poverty, expanding health care, and reforming the criminal justice system. He believes he can do more in Congress because "that's where the future of the country is largely determined." @ritchietorres

MONDAIRE JONES

U.S. Representative-Elect

"For me, policy is personal," says Mondaire Jones, who is set to become one of the first two Black gay men in Congress. He grew up poor in Spring Valley, N.Y., a suburb of New York City. "Now I get to run to represent the same people whose houses my grandmother cleaned," Jones says. Jones won the June primary for U.S. House of Representatives in New York's 17th Congressional District, over seven candidates. In a largely Democratic district, he's likely to win the November election. He and Ritchie Torres, from a neighboring district, will be the first members of Congress from the Black LGBTQ+ population.

Jones is committed to making a difference for low-income Americans. He supports universal health care, a program to assure that all Americans have housing, a $15 minimum wage, tuition-free public college, cancellation of student debt, sweeping criminal justice reform, and combating climate change. "I will fight tooth and nail for those things Democrats say they believe in," he says. @mondairejones

LAURA JANE BRETT PHOTOGRAPHY (JONES); COURTESY (TORRES)

TIFFANY CABÁN

Activist and Politician

Tiffany Cabán — a public defender, politician, and political organizer — ran for New York's Queens County district attorney last year, only to lose by a handful of votes. A victory would have made Cabán the first Latina and first queer person to hold the position. In September, Cabán announced her candidacy to represent the 22nd District on the New York City Council in the 2021 election. She's also been working as a national organizer with the Working Families Party.

"I started this work after my 2019 campaign for Queens district attorney, where I ran on a radically decarceral platform calling for less policing and incarceration, and more investment in the true source of safety — our communities," says Cabán. "We are fighting to shrink the reach of our carceral systems that brutalize Black, brown, queer, immigrant, and poor communities. More broadly, this work is about paradigm shifting as we redefine public safety. Changing the narrative around who and what keeps us safe." @cabanforqueens

MALCOLM KENYATTA

Pennsylvania State Representative

Malcolm Kenyatta has had a landmark year, being one of the first LGBTQ+ speakers to give a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. At one point he was joined by his fiancé, University of Pennsylvania professor Matthew Miller. Later he got a shout-out for his hairstyle from former President Barack Obama. He also ran unopposed for reelection to the Pennsylvania House. Initially elected in 2018, he's the first out LGBTQ+ person of color in the legislature. Kenyatta hopes his visibility will provide a "look what I can do" moment for young LGBTQ+ people, inspiring them to pursue their own dreams. "It's so difficult to be what you can't see," he says. Of being out, he notes, "Bringing our full selves to the work that we do is not a 'nice to have it,' it's critical." @malcolmkenyatta

COREY TORPIE (CABAN); COURTESY (KENYATTA)

COURTESY

MARY TRUMP

Psychologist and Author

Too Much and Never Enough aptly describes Donald Trump, and is a perfect title for the best-selling book written about him by his lesbian niece Mary Trump. The psychologist wanted people to understand, particularly during an election year, her uncle's character and psychopathologies. Plus, she says, "it is my honor to do everything in my power to get Joe Biden and Kamala Harris elected."

"I've learned that the American people and people around the world were starving for information that could help them understand not just Donald but his supporters," she says. "I think that's been one of the most demoralizing aspects of this fiasco — the extent to which elected Republicans were so eager to support a man who is clearly unfit and working Americans were willing to ignore his racism, misogyny, fiscal irresponsibility, and willingness to lie to them about everything."

The book, which has been on *The New York Times*' and Amazon's best seller lists and remains the best-selling nonfiction book of 2020, benefits from Mary Trump's training as a clinical psychologist. Addressing mental health issues is the next challenge ahead for Americans, the author says. "This country is headed towards one of the greatest, if not the greatest, mental health crisis in our history, in part because of the seemingly endless stream of crises we've been subjected to over the last four years as well as the severity of the health and economic crises we're currently living through," she says.

The rise of extremism and creeping authoritarianism, the increase in income inequality, the destruction of norms, and the betrayal of our institutions, all traceable to her uncle's actions, have had a massive impact on the American psyche, she adds. "Helping the American people recover from the trauma of COVID and the attendant economic hardships it has exposed the American people to will require a re-imagining of a system that has too often failed us." @maryltrump

DR. RACHEL LEVINE

Pennsylvania's Secretary of Health

As Pennsylvania's secretary of health, Dr. Rachel Levine leads a coordinated effort between the administration of Gov. Tom Wolf and other agencies against COVID-19. She does so in the face of conservative opposition as well as transphobic attacks from critics. Her mantra: "Stay calm, stay home, and stay safe."

But Levine's work isn't confined to the Keystone State. As president of the Association for State and Territorial Health Officials, she helps coordinate pandemic responses among all the states, helping to save lives across the country. This big-picture, cooperative approach to public health is needed now more than ever, she says, as is addressing America's health disparities. "Our vulnerable populations have been hit particularly hard by this virus. This includes seniors and... minority populations such as [Black], Latinx, and LGTBQ+ individuals. The social determinants of health, such as one's income, their living situation, their education, where they live, also are critical elements of health equity." Protecting the vulnerable will require a community effort from all Americans "We have learned that we must be united in order to stop the spread of this virus." @secretarylevine

GOVERNMENT OF PENNSYLVANIA (LEVINE); MATT ROTH (KING)

MARK S. KING

HIV+ Blogger

It took a minute, but Maryland-based blogger Mark S. King is now the hottest thing in journalism, being named NLGJA's LGBTQ Journalist of the Year and garnering the 2020 GLAAD Award for Outstanding Blog. King — the man behind *My Fabulous Disease* — is finally getting some long deserved recognition.

"I am an aging gay white man living with HIV, and proud of it," says the long-term survivor ("I will be 60 this December. If my calculations are correct and I became HIV-positive in 1980, that's 40 of my 60 years."). "I'm a guy with HIV and a keyboard. Both of those things are a source of power. It takes a certain shamelessness to write so much about, well, me. But our stories as older LGBTQ people and as long-term HIV survivors are fascinating and funny and sexy and complicated. I don't diminish that anymore, but yeah, winning a GLAAD Award doesn't hurt. I'm still the gay kid looking for validation."

As COVID-19 took away resources previously spent on HIV in 2020, King came away with a lesson for us all. "It isn't always about us. We all have our shit, every group and every generation. I survived AIDS, and there are plenty of people reading this who survived a lot worse. Let's take our skills and our trauma and our gratitude...and go help other people, for God's sake. Otherwise, what was it all for?"

"I realized something awful this year," says the long-time advocate. "All these years of activism, and I always thought, at least subconsciously, I'll do the gay thing and the HIV thing. Someone else will do the race thing. My God, the privilege of that mindset! I have to call out the shit I see other white people say and do. And I've learned that we're dangerously stubborn, we liberals, because we get offended at the very idea that we benefit from white supremacy and systemic racism. We need to shut up and find humility and examine ourselves. The call is coming from inside the house, y'all." @myfabdisease

WANDA SYKES & PAGE HURWITZ

Comedian and Producer

This was a year of queer women and women of color pushing boundaries in Hollywood — like how lesbian writer, actress, and comedian Wanda Sykes and lesbian Jewish veteran producer Page Hurwitz have done with Push It Productions. The production company received Emmy nominations for two separate Tiffany Haddish vehicles — her stand-up special *Black Mitzvah* and *Tiffany Haddish Presents: They Ready*, which highlights trans and cis female comedians in a white/male-dominated industry. Push It is also behind Fortune Feimster's latest hilarious (and wonderfully queer) stand-up special, *Sweet & Salty*.

The Emmy nods, confirm "that our approach to stand-up specials, which is different from how most producers tackle them, is on point," says Hurwitz. "We are very hands on…because these specials are now calling cards for comedians; they are incredibly important for their careers. The opportunity to stand on stage and say anything to a worldwide audience is too important these days to treat casually. The best comedy is powerful in its ability to unite, change minds, and elevate the audience."

Sykes adds that she's also proud of Push It's other productions that got less recognition, including "our hilarious series *Talk Show The Game Show*…hosted by out gay comedian Guy Branum and was based on his live show of the same name…. We're also extremely proud of our Epix show *Unprotected Sets*…. The cast is so diverse and talented. Each comedian delivers a killer performance and a compelling interview. Scout Durwood, Paris Sashay, and Daniel Webb — all out LGBTQ comedians — were among the 12 comedians handpicked for the first season."

@iamwandaskykes @pagehurwitz

COURTESY (BOTH)

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ADAM OUAHMANE

JO MAMA & LUCY STOOLE

Drag Activists

Over the last year, a series of grassroots movements have pulled Chicago's history of discrimination and erasure of queer people of color into focus. As tens of thousands of Black Lives Matter protesters demonstrated across the world, local drag queens of color rose up to challenge the city's racist club culture that has historically excluded and mistreated them.

This summer, the "Drag March for Change," led by Chicago's own Queen Jo Mama (opposite left) and co-organized by Lucy Stoole (right, Jo's drag mother), Lúc Ami, Miss Toto, *RuPaul's Drag Race* stars Shea Couleé, The Vixen, and Dida Ritz, as well as activists Zola and Tatyana Chante, brought in over 15,000 protesters. All of them showed up demanding accountability for racist policing in the city and accountability for the mistreatment of Black performers by bar owners and managers.

Jo Mama has witnessed this mistreatment firsthand as a bartender and performer. She and Chante played integral roles in founding the new Chicago Black Drag Council, which holds forums to address racism in Boystown's drag scene. The council recently organized a conversation with over 20 general managers at several North Side venues about their discriminatory behavior and continue to ignite dialogue across the city about the nuances of micro-aggressions that Black drag queens, some of whom depend on their performance earnings to survive, face every night. To commemorate their induction into the Out100, Jo Mama and Lucy Stoole sat down to discuss the genesis of the movement and the future of Chicago's nightlife.

LUCY STOOLE: I've always viewed Chicago as home. It's probably the first place in all my years of living that has actually felt like a home.

JO MAMA: I can relate to that. It became a safe home away from home for me. I moved here 12 years ago from Atlanta. I wanted to move to a city that was similar in pace and also was just as accommodating and welcoming. I've always loved that part about being in the Midwest, particularly in Chicago.

LUCY: You are one of the main reasons the "Drag March for Change" even happened. It's a huge point of pride in our relationship because that was a huge feat. I got to watch you take this on and really nail it.

JO MAMA: It was the murder of George Floyd that really activated me and I think a lot of us. We've dealt with this a lot, especially as Black people, and we've grown up seeing it. I remember my father pointing out these things on the news and stopping me, saying, "Look I want you to see this and understand this." This one just really hit different for a lot of people. I saw this fire happening throughout the city. I felt extremely helpless. I woke up the next day thinking, *I have to do something.* So I led my own march by myself from my home up in Edgewater on the North Side, all the way to downtown. I ended up in front of Trump Tower and saw that the bridges were still raised. I couldn't reach the other side but I could hear the screams, I could hear the sirens, I could feel the horns. I felt even more helpless. I woke up the next day and found a march that was organized by Tatyana Chante, which brought about over 5,000 people. They organized the whole march in a day. I went in drag. I threw on this neon green lime pantsuit and went at it. People were like, "Oh my God, we came to find you. We saw that you were going in drag. We want to march with you. We want to do this." And that's what sparked the idea of using our platforms as drag queens to shine attention onto the issue and how we can really use that part of our voice to center what really needs to be centered right now. I contacted Tatyana and was like, "Am I crazy that I want to do this?" But once I realized it was really just about moving people from point A to point B safely, I just used my background with events as a drag queen to make that happen. You really don't know how prepared you are for something until you face it, but usually you're more prepared than you think. The network I've gained through knowing people like you and all the other performers helped me to create this whole event that brought out 15,000 people.

LUCY: 15,000 people. It's always crazy to hear that number. I'll never forget that moment of looking out in the crowd and going on that stage. It was monumental and important, especially that the drag community was doing this in Boystown. As we all know, racism permeates every part of our culture and being Black queer people, it's two times as hard. So it was really important to be having this conversation in that neighborhood, which is also another one of the most affluent neighborhoods in our city right now. To have us marching in that way and being seen in a way we had not been seen before and being heard in a way that we had not been heard before. It was phenomenal. I had already been on my journey of activism and trying to figure out the best way I can be of service to my community and my people, but that was the thing that really pushed me over the edge. We have got to make a firm change starting right now.

JO MAMA: I knew we needed to have 12 [speakers] to mirror the 12 apostles to bear witness to what we'd all gone through. Everything about it was very intentional. I always repeat that because it's so important when you are creating anything expressively and you want to get your point across. I've learned to do so with intention. There's also a lot in Black spirituality about intention. It goes back to our own hidden history and our hidden religion that we had to hide back in the slave days. It's so important to keep it present in your mind and to have that intention, put it right on the forefront, to get something done. That's always helped me.

[At the march], there were little fights with keeping the police out of the situation because the mayor kept trying to butt in and we we're like, "We're not really doing this with you. You're kind of public enemy number one, so just back off and let us self-govern because we can. Your policing is literally killing us." That became a huge thing, as well as keeping everyone safe and hydrated and healthy, especially in the time of COVID. You played a huge role in helping to ground me and bringing more people in.

LUCY: I'm so excited what the Drag March has led to. It has started great things, like the Chicago Black Drag Council. I don't know if that would have happened or if we would have come together in that way if it wasn't for you and Tatyana kicking that off.

JO MAMA: I think community is the key. Also, history repeats itself if you don't correct it and move forward. I built off of what we'd already done before with the Civil Rights Act and looking back at the march for gay rights, and everything that was done before us with Marsha P. Johnson and how they organized it — even reaching out to the circuit queens to use their big, huge white bodies for good.

LUCY: Exactly.

JO MAMA: I think there's a responsibility that comes with so much privilege that we get as drag queens. We have to give back. I've learned that if we give people the opportunity, people are more than happy to take it. It's been rewarding to help that in any way and to take part.

@jomamafunny @tyislucystoole

QWEEN JEAN

Activist and Costume Designer

If you marched for Black trans lives or watched footage of a protest this year, you may have seen Qween Jean dressed to kill with a megaphone in hand. The queer designer made sure her message was heard loud and clear: "We have been excluded, and we are demanding equal rights, equal representation, and equal support across the board."

Jean says she was working toward "dismantling the systems and work models that did not include and honor everyone's contributions." prior to the shutdowns. "Before the pandemic, our success was always adjacent to whiteness. Ain't nobody got time for that!" Jean explains. She is hopeful that in the coming years we'll see more "authentically diverse representation on stage and behind the scenes" that will connect with audiences not bound to a white and patriarchal past. "We have such young, talented BIPOC artists who need that opportunity to display their strengths and magical gifts. The change I'm envisioning for the industry will be permanent. The age of appeasement is over!" @qween_jean

RAQUEL WILLIS

Activist and Organizer

Raquel Willis is a Black trans woman, and "a writer, activist, and cultural organizer dedicated to uplifting the dignity, power, and work of people on the margins, particularly Black transgender people." She's worked at the Transgender Law Center, served as executive editor at *Out*, and now works as director of communications for the Ms. Foundation. This year she was one of the organizers of the largest action in history for Black trans lives, a rally and march where over 15,000 people took to the streets of New York City, something that earned her, along with the other organizers, the Stonewall Foundation's 2020 Vision Award.

Willis says she's learned that "people on the margins have even more resilience inside of us than we could ever imagine," and that "our community will never truly be free until the most marginalized of us have full control of our narratives and livelihoods." Willis has started writing her memoir, which will feature "some of the lessons I've learned being involved in various social justice movements for several years." @raquel_willis

MADISON SWART (JEAN); TANYA TAYLOR (WILLIS)

HelmutLanguage

WEST DAKOTA

Drag Activist

When West Dakota, a prominent Brooklyn, N.Y., drag performer and social activist, first got the idea to organize a march to draw attention to the disproportionate rates of violence against Black trans women, they had no idea it would be one of the biggest demonstrations ever for the cause. What became the Brooklyn Liberation March drew 15,000 participants dressed in white marched through the streets of the borough in June. She says "witnessing the strength and interconnectedness of my community" was a highlight of 2020.

"Being out to me means being honest with myself, acknowledging and working through the layers of shame and honoring my truth," says Dakota. "Living honestly with myself and sharing that with others means deeper, more fulfilling connections. It means allowing myself to feel cute, to feel strong, to feel sexy and safe and tender." @iamwestdakota

WALELA NEHANDA

Cancer Activist and Organizer

This year, Walela Nehanda helped get needed supplies to 200 immune-compromised people during the shortages caused by the pandemic. The 26-year-old Black queer disabled trans nonbinary femme organizer and creative with advanced leukemia has also gotten 6,430 people registered with the lifesaving bone marrow donor list through Be the Match (text "ItsWalela" to 61474 to register and send in a swab kit to see if you're a match). They've also dealt with the disappointment of finding a bone marrow transplant match for themselves only to see it fall through at the last minute. And yet Nehanda says their biggest accomplishment this year has simply been staying indoors.

"I've been in isolation with my partner, Akili, since March because I'm immune-compromised," Nehanda says. "It may be small, but it's a feat to me because it truly has tested me in so many ways." While in lockdown they have also been able to initiate some long-awaited projects "and now I'm starting to bring them to reality. It's very exciting to see them begin to materialize — my younger self would be proud too." We certainly are. @itswalela

WILLIE NORRIS (DAKOTA); AKILI BALOGUN (NEHANDA)

RASHAD ROBINSON

President, Color of Change

Color of Change was created in response to the lack of federal aid to Black communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Since becoming its president in 2011, civil rights leader Rashad Robinson has helped grow the nonprofit into the largest racial justice organization in the U.S. During his tenure, the organization has added 1 million members and four new offices.

"At Color of Change, we're working to create consequences, accountability, and a new set of rules for decision makers when it comes to issues that affect Black people's lives," says Robinson. "In all, we are creating a more human and less hostile world for Black people in America. And when Black people win...all oppressed people win."

This year, especially, "proved once again that the fight for racial justice can motivate and mobilize people like few other fights can," he says. "In early May, people were saying that protest was over — there could be no protest in the age of COVID-19. And then look what happened when racial justice became the issue.... The uprisings we saw this year were the culmination of the last decade of a new approach to organizing for racial justice, and the next step is converting that energy and the new consciousness into real power. That's what I call moving from presence to power."

@rashadrobinson

COURAGE
COURAGE

SCOTT WIENER

State Senator

California State Sen. Scott Wiener fought hard this year, having played a huge role in passing a law requiring health care providers to start collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data for all communicable diseases. He also learned firsthand the dangers of disinformation campaigns and agitated conspiracy theorists when he sought to close a loophole in state law that treated queer people differently from straight ones convicted of the same crimes. "I got over 1,000 death threats and tens of thousands of comments slandering me," he says. "It was a terrifying glimpse into the future." Never one to back down from the good fight, Wiener sees an opportunity to bring disinfecting transparency to the deeper, underlying problem of far-right radicalism and online misinformation. "As progressive elected officials, we need to be prepared to fight back against misinformation by encouraging media literacy, holding social media companies accountable, and making sure correct information is out there and available," he says. @Scott_Wiener

COURTESY (ROBINSON); CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE (WIENER)

SHANNON MINTER

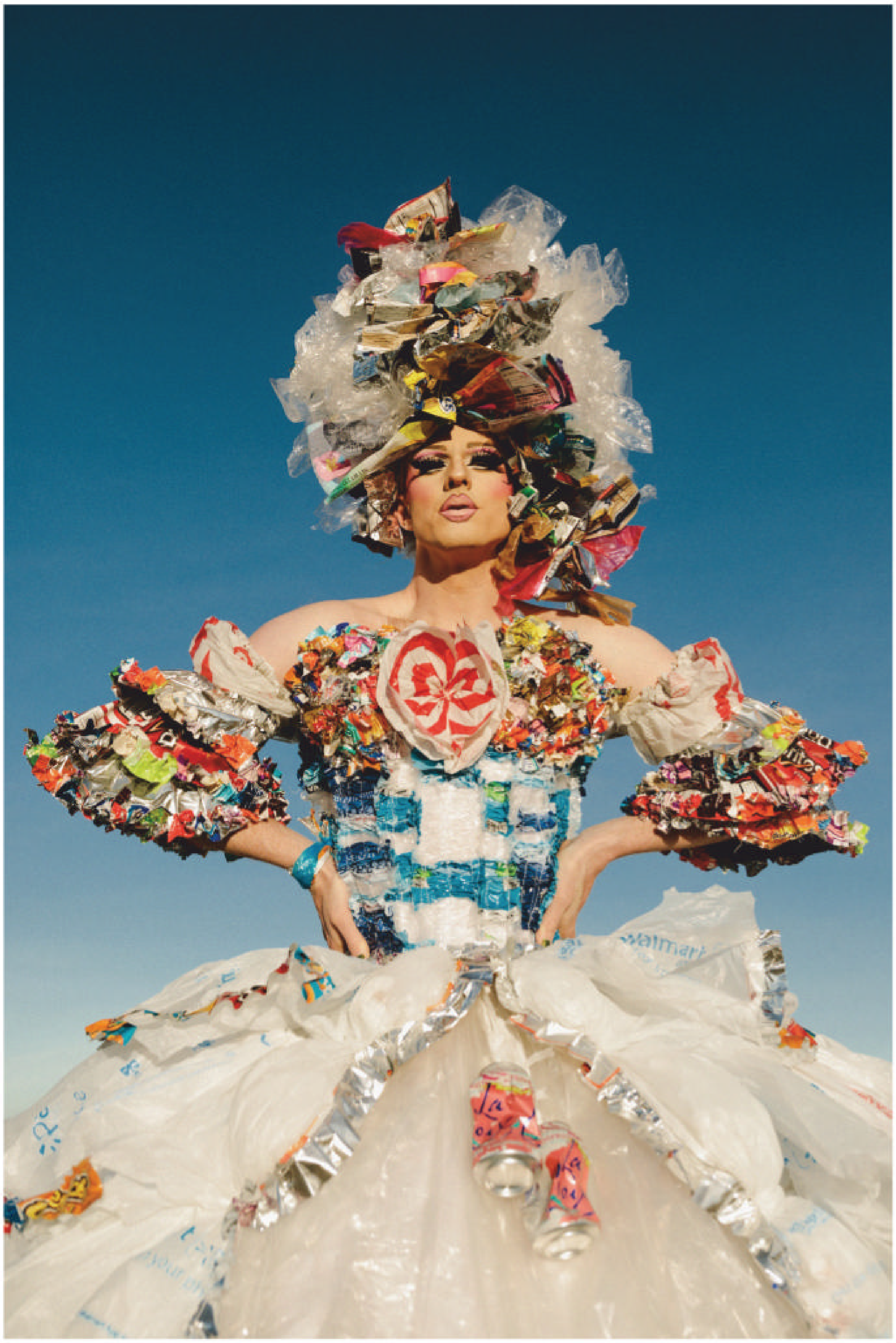
Legal Director, NCLR

In fighting the Trump administration, Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, sees Trump's attack on transgender service members as particularly "vicious and shocking." Minter argues, "If they can get away with banning transgender people from the military, the same arguments will be used to justify discrimination against trans people in civilian [spaces]."

NCLR has responded aggressively to this threat, and its efforts are working. "Before the ban, most people had no idea that transgender people were serving in the military," Minter explains. "Now they do and the great majority... support transgender people's right to serve on equal terms."

This year Minter also continued fighting for federal legislation to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination and building bridges with conservative religious Americans. But what Minter says he's most proud of in his 25-year career is his work to stop conversion therapy, an issue he credits with first drawing him to NCLR as a law student back in 1992. NCLR's Born Perfect campaign to end conversion therapy is now "by far, the most successful legislative campaign" in the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement, he says. In just eight years NCLR has helped pass 20 state and nearly 80 local laws banning use of the devastating practice on minors. @shannonminter5

TRISH TUNNEY



PATTIE GONIA

Sustainable Drag Queen

"My work, at the end of the day, is advocacy," says nonbinary sustainable drag persona Pattie Gonia. "Figuring out how to take action and encourage others to do the same is just about the most important thing…[but] I have never felt more at a loss of knowing what to do in my own life to make a difference. Time and time again, though, a question that's helped me find where to start is 'What is the work that's available to me and only to me?' and then chasing the hell out of the answer to that question."

"Reduce, reuse recycle, *bitch*!" Gonia says of their environmentalist approach to fashion and drag. "Sustainable drag means applying the ethics behind sustainability and applying it to my art form of drag. What it looks like is normalizing outfit repeating, buying less, reusing more, upcycling pieces from old looks and making it work with what I've got instead of thinking the solution is buying something new." Looking past this year, Gonia says "I am excited to fall down many different rabbit holes; I am excited to get lost. Let's see what we can find, shall we?" @pattiegonia

KAREN WANG

KEITH PARRIS

Activist

Keith Parris, a 21-year-old amputee, influencer, activist, and author, shows that "body positivity is a necessary movement now," and encourages folks to "love the body that they're in and show off their amazing shape, size, and curves." The gay Gen Z activist overcame an eating disorder and self-harm (he's been in recovery for five years) and used this adversity to build a platform for himself. His *Amputee Story*, earned thousands of views on Wattpad, and readers were moved by Parris's transparency. (Not just anyone can make charging your artificial leg like your iPhone sound as commonplace as Parris does.) Next on his list is acting and modeling, as he continues to "advocate for my LGBTQ+ community and amputee community." While he's dreaming of diving into the "reality world next year so I can show more of my life," never discount this guy's abilities. "I was told I would never make it in this industry and never be in a magazine — but look at me now!" @keithteboy_

CODY RENARD RICHARD

Stage Manager and Educator

A successful Broadway stage manager who has worked on Cirque du Soleil productions and with folks like *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, Cody Renard Richard is also an educator and advocate. In addition to being named one of Variety's 10 Broadway Players to Watch in 2020 (the first stage manager to receive this honor), Richard received the Young Alumni Award from Webster University, delivered the keynote speech at the National Collaborators Conference, and worked on MTV's Video Music Awards. He recently founded the Cody Renard Richard Scholarship Program, which helps support BIPOC theater students. "I have been really focusing on initiatives and programs that will move the needle forward for the next generation of Black and brown folx," he says of this year. "We must love on each other and show up for each other in any way that we can." @codyrenard

AUSTINYOURFACE (PARRIS); ELLIS DAWSON (RICHARD)

ELLE HEARNS

Executive Director, The Marsha P. Johnson Institute

Elle Hearns might be best known as a co-founding member of Black Lives Matter, but her work and activism goes well beyond that. She is also the executive director of The Marsha P. Johnson Institute, which works to end to violence against all trans people. The organization is credited for arranging the first ever National Day of Action for Black Trans Women in response to the murders of Amber Monroe, Kandis Capri, and Elisha Walker. Hearns has been honored with the Young Women's Achievement Award for Advocacy and Organizing by the Women's Information Network, the Black Feminist Human Rights Defender award by Black Women's Blueprint, and was named a Woke 100 honoree by *Essence* magazine. Hearns' operates politically from the perspectives of Black nationalism, humanist theory, and black trans theory and practice. ““My greatest lesson this year has been to trust the standards that I've been creating for myself over a lifetime,” she says. “And to trust that despite the darkest moments of this time and this life that life's greatest moments are still in store and on the way for me.” @soulfreedreams

CEYENNE DOROSHOW

Founder and Executive Director, G.L.I.T.S.

GQ describes Ceyenne Doroshow as a “one-woman Swiss Army knife for those who've needed help of virtually any kind,” and it's an apt characterization. The founder and executive director of Gays and Lesbians Living in a Transgender Society (G.L.I.T.S.), Doroshow is aiding and empowering trans sex workers by offering harm-reduction strategies and respecting their rights and dignity. “It's about bringing real answers to real problems,” she says of her work. “We are a resilient people.” The organization acquired a 12-unit building in Queens, N.Y., to provide stable, safe housing for Black trans people. “We've never had something specific to us,” she says. “It is a landmark moment in history.” The location will also offer case management services to residents with specific needs, such as those who've been incarcerated and are building a new life on the outside. While remodeling the building, Doroshow's added interior decorating to her list of skills, which already included writing, performing, and culinary arts (she's also the coauthor of the Caribbean cookbook *Cooking in Heels*). @doroshow

JOHN LAMPARSKI FOR GETTY IMAGES (DOROSHOW); COURTESY (HEARNS)

FLY WITH KATE

COURTESY (ASTI)

ROBINA ASTI

Trans Activist, WWII U.S. Navy Fighter Pilot

Ninety-nine-year-old Robina Asti, a transgender woman, flew combat missions over Midway Island and elsewhere in the Pacific theater during World War II long before she transitioned. She returned home and married at age 40, helping create a family with two children. After the accidental death of her 9-year-old son, Asti was forced to reevaluate her life, and realized, “I wanted to transition...[so] that I could live my life as an authentic woman.”

Asti transitioned in the 1970s and remained relatively under the gender spectrum radar until the passing of her husband in 2012. When the federal government denied her standard Social Security survivor’s benefits (claiming she was not legally a woman at the time of their marriage), she fought back — and (eventually) won. She now operates the Cloud Dancers Foundation, an LGBTQ+ wish-fulfillment charity seeking to inspire and empower one wish at a time. (CloudDancers.org)

REGGIE GREER

LGBTQ+ Engagement Director, Biden-Harris Campaign

Before becoming the first Black disabled gay man in history to lead LGBTQ+ outreach for a presidential campaign, Reggie Greer already had an impressive résumé as deputy director of public engagement at the U.S. Department of Transportation during the Obama administration. These days he's basking in gratitude after spending nearly all of 2002 speaking directly to queer voters about their concerns and hopes for the future.

"The LGBTQ+ community is extremely diverse — spanning the complete spectrum of America's social, racial, and cultural landscape," he says. "It was important to me that our campaign lifted up every segment of our community, reflecting Vice President Biden's desire that every American be seen, heard, and included."

Through the Out for Biden initiative, which is made up of an incredibly thoughtful and diverse crew of people, Greer helped build partnerships and launched queer coalitions that included several first-ever events for a presidential campaign, celebrating LGBTQ+ Arab-Americans, Two-Spirit people, Black people, Latinx, AAPIs, and people of faith. Out for Biden also worked to include and center trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer voices in campaign-wide programming. "There is no substitute for real, genuine human connection and that extending grace to people, including oneself, is extremely important." 🐦 @rwgreer

JAMAL BROWN

National Press Secretary, Biden-Harris Campaign

Wrapping up perhaps one of the most monumental campaigns in recent history, Jamal Brown's role was equal parts spokesperson, messaging strategist, policy wonk, and avid researcher for the Biden-Harris campaign. But most importantly, as national press secretary, it was his responsibility to ensure the American people knew they had a fighter and champion for them in Joe Biden.

"When I was younger and my mother and I were on welfare for a period, I learned during that time to turn your grief into purpose," Brown says. "I was reminded of that lesson this year as the epidemic of racism and racial injustice came to the forefront of the American consciousness. It wasn't anything new for Black and brown people, but it exposed the everyday trauma we live, cope with, and overcome."

Still, the fight is never over — especially for Brown. "As a country we are ever evolving. We've never fully lived up to our founding ideals, but we've never stopped reaching for them either. Over the next three years, I see our country continuing the march towards our promise of equality, equity, and justice, no matter how arduous the journey may be." 🐦 @JTOBrown

CASSIDY DUHON (GREER); CASSIDY DUHON (BROWN); TRAVIS W. KEYES PHOTOGRAPHY (JEAN-PIERRE)

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE

Chief of Staff to Kamala Harris

This political activist and author is helping to move the nation forward — and she's making history in the process. Karine Jean-Pierre played a key role as Joe Biden and Kamala Harris ran for the White House, joining the campaign initially as senior adviser and then becoming chief of staff to Harris, making her the first Black woman and first lesbian to hold that position for a vice-presidential nominee.

Jean-Pierre knows that America has a long way to go toward becoming an inclusive nation that works for everyone. But she and other women of color are pushing it in the right direction. More women ran for office in 2020 than ever before, and more than a third of them were women of color.

"America is progressing towards a stronger, more inclusive future — and I know women of color are a driving force in that evolution," she says. "Soon, I believe our politics will start to show it a bit more too."

The author of the appropriately titled 2019 book *Moving Forward* wants to help others make their voices heard. The book is both a memoir and a guide to political involvement. "I wanted to demystify the political process and make it accessible to everyone who wants to get involved," she says. "Helping open the door for other people will always be something I'm proud of." 🐦 @k_jeanpierre

Open space. Open minds.

What brings thousands of LGBTQ visitors to Key West every year? Is it the gay tours, the clothing-optional guest houses, the we-were-out-before-it-was-in ideology? Maybe it's our vibrant cultural scene: the eclectic art, the gingerbread architecture or the colorful history on display at every turn. Either way, with our open minds and wide-open spaces, Key West truly is an island unto itself.

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BRIGETTE LUNDY-PAINE

Actor

In November 2019, *Atypical* star Brigette Lundy-Paine made headlines when they came out as nonbinary on Instagram. In their life and career, Lundy-Paine has been a guiding light to LGBTQ+ young people. Their *Atypical* character, Casey, is a queer teen navigating coming out and young love. Thousands have lauded the positive impact of Casey's relationship with classmate Izzie (Fivel Stewart) in the #CazzieNation hashtag.

On the big screen, Lundy-Paine continues to break the mold in films like *Bombshell*, about sexual harassment at Fox News, and *Bill & Ted Face the Music*, the surprise hit of the socially distanced summer. As Billie, the daughter of Ted (Keanu Reeves), Lundy-Paine brought a "genderlessness" to the part that defied tropes while literally representing the next generation of Hollywood. This representation is essential when, as GLAAD reports, no film from a major studio featured trans or nonbinary characters in 2019. Off-screen, Lundy-Paine finds other ways of being creative. "I've been painting lately," they share. "Currently working on a nude of my upstairs neighbor inspired by Botticelli's Primavera." Lundy-Paine is also a cofounder of Waif, an alternative art magazine for "waifs," described as "whores," "prudes," "nudes," and "dudes." The magazine recently held a fundraiser hosted by artist Sina al-Qamar for the top surgery of one of its community members, Mia. In a year marked by much fear and division, Lundy-Paine stands by the Golden Rule. "This year I've learned how important being gentle is, both to yourself and to beings around you." @briiiiiiiiiiig

JEN RICHARDS

Actress and Writer

Self-described "cottage lesbian" Jen Richards has been making the most of the isolation of quarantine. In addition to getting engaged, the writer and actor seen in Netflix's *Disclosure* and the indie film *Gossamer Fields* says she's "learned the profound satisfaction of installing your own ceiling fan" and "that homemade pickles are one of life's easily earned, but great, rewards." She's also spent the months "actively reorienting" herself to tackling the systemic racism that was laid bare in the protests calling out violence against people of color. Despite the darkness of the times, though, Richards sees a silver lining to the lockdown."As writing rooms become remote, the industry is going to open itself to more writers than the handful who can afford to live in Los Angeles," she says, identifying the potential for more "diverse perspectives" which make for better more representative stories. "My hope is that it creates a positive feedback loop where more audiences feel represented and therefore engage more, leading to higher demand for new kinds of stories and incentives to provide them."
@smartassjen

TONI SMALLS (LUNDY-PAINE); MATT SAYLES (RICHARDS)

P. DAVID EBERSOLE & TODD HUGHES

Documentarians

Partners in life and in business, P. David Ebersole and Todd Hughes have developed their own niche of documentaries profiling creative pioneers who break rules, forge new ground, and change the way we live.

Over the past decade, the husbands have done six feature films, including *Alaska Is a Drag* and *Mansfield 66/67*. Their most recent, *House of Cardin*, follows iconic designer Pierre Cardin at age 98 for nearly a year and includes interviews with Jean-Paul Gaultier, Naomi Campbell, Sharon Stone, Dionne Warwick, and others. The art of cinema, they argue, has never been more critical. And it's the filmmaker's role to challenge the status quo.

"In times like these, the art of film should be willing to be controversial, sometimes confrontational, and whenever possible, at its finest," Ebersole tells *Out*. "That doesn't necessarily mean it needs to be loud; it just needs to be good and culturally observant. Entertainment is quietly becoming a monopoly again after a long struggle to break it up. That should be a call to all artists to create and define our truth through our work and to find new ways to get it out there to the public in an increasingly corporate environment. Otherwise, Netflix, Apple, and Amazon are going to do it for you."

Outside of their cinematic ventures, Ebersole and Hughes are also award-winning tablescapers, which for the layperson, is the art of creating a thematic dinner table. Together they've won the grand prize ribbon at the Los Angeles County Fair three times. Clearly, a couple who tablescapes together stays together. 🐦 @EbersoleHughes

ANTHONY MASTERSON

GERARD BUSH AND CHRISTOPHER RENZ

Writers and Filmmakers

RYAN DEFOREEST

One of the most innovative films this year is *Antebellum*. Written and directed by boyfriends and creative partners Gerard Bush and Christopher Renz, the film follows a character fully embodied by Janelle Monáe (our cover star) as she is seemingly transported to the antebellum South and assumes the identity of an enslaved woman named Eden.

The film draws from a short story written by Bush, a gay Black man, which itself was inspired by a vivid nightmare he had about a frightened woman who reached out to him through time and space for help. Bush and Renz — whose careers span advertising and social justice work, including *17*, a visual EP inspired by the murder of Trayvon Martin — ultimately came together to write the screenplay for *Antebellum*, which can now be streamed on demand. We sat down with the couple to talk about their creative process and why the polarizing film struck such a nerve.

OUT: First of all, thank you for this film. Projects that spark dialogue and conversation like this are keeping us engaged with each other during the pandemic.

GERARD BUSH: Thank you. We're trying to use this time in a way that can be most productive to our sanity and also our art. I think those two things are inextricably linked. We create because it's cathartic and that is really helpful, so the whole time we've just been writing and we feel like that has anchored us.

The process in creating this film started as a horrifying nightmare. Christopher, Do you remember the first time Gerard told you about his dream?

CHRISTOPHER RENZ: He was casually telling me about it the next morning. I was sitting on the couch and he's making coffee in the kitchen. He's not looking in my direction. He's telling me, you know, the bullet points of the story. He turned around and I already got the laptop out. I'm like, "We're writing this. Today." And we wrote the short story, which we then based the script on.

BUSH: We have a lot of respect for the written word. We're voracious readers, but we also did not imagine at the time that we were going to be taking it from short story to script. We really had an appreciation just for the short story, and then when some people in town got ahold of it, specifically [producer] Zev Foreman, it was when they looked at us. We'd only been [in Los Angeles], at the time, like six months. Our friend Kenny had gotten the short story over to a company. We said, "Kenny, I think you're crazy. Looking at this. It's not a film. It's a short story."

RENZ: At the time we were excited because we were in talks with *The New Yorker* about it and that would have been incredible for us. That was what we saw.

BUSH: After conversations with people in town, I think we had sensed enough to know we should respect their opinion. That was the only reason we moved forward.

It was clearly meant to be.

BUSH: I don't think that we would have said, "Let's make a movie!" out of something that didn't feel like it came from a place that was in some way ancestral at the time. I thought that it was from the past. And now I think that maybe it was an SOS from the future. Because of that, we felt, *OK, we're protected in some way*, because in this world, when you have the audacity to say something that can prove disturbing or can ignite a conversation, it's not a pleasant experience for artists. You're thrown into this spin cycle.

As a genre, the short story is often overlooked.

BUSH: There's something about sitting in the privacy of a nook or cranny where you feel really comfortable with being alone and with your thoughts and your imagination and reading words on a page and allowing it to take you somewhere. In film, we're creating the visual representation, the experience of the written word. We still like to leave space within the film where the audience can use their own imaginations, because oftentimes, it's much more powerful than what you could create.

What was it like writing and directing the project as a couple?

RENZ: It was a lot of research and reading, diving into white supremacists and Civil War reenactments, and a lot of research into white women and their role [in American slavery] for Jena Malone's character. We shared a book with her called *They Were Her Property* that really shows an honest view of white women's complacency.

BUSH: Some white women!

RENZ: Some white women. [Laughs]

BUSH: Just to be clear. [Laughs]

RENZ: But a lot of times they get a pass like it's, "Oh, you know, they just went along," or whatever. That was not [always] the case. That wasn't the case for this character we wrote. She is kind of the real mastermind behind it....

BUSH: And because of our background in social justice activism, in terms of the art, we were becoming increasingly fascinated by the potential for a collective psychopathy that can metastasize through a society. I think about how our rights as gay men, everything is really temporary. There is a need for constant vigilance and an optimization of approach and strategy because your rights, they don't feel, for me, permanent. And because of that, Christopher and I wanted to better understand white supremacy, its origins. And then in getting to the origins of white supremacy, the shock that it was right in front of us the entire time, that the country was founded on a white supremacist idea. That was really difficult to have to confront as an artist because you need to be authentic and honest about what you're putting on the screen. Some people are not ready for that. Some people are not comfortable with the truth.

There's also a clear juxtaposition you lay out in the film as well.

BUSH: Christopher and I find ourselves enveloped by some really dynamic Black women, and women of all sorts, because that's who's in our gaggle of friends and family. Outside of the context of what is seemingly the antebellum South, it was imperative to us that we also demonstrate the nuance of the experience of so many ultramodern, successful, high-achieving, well-traveled, well-read Black women who are mothers and sisters and friends and pillars of community. And what does that look like in the juxtaposition with the antebellum South? Because in all of our research, it was really difficult to identify where and what happened to Black Americans prior to the kidnapping and forced labor. You know, where were these communities they came from? What husband or wife or partner were they stolen from? And what was annihilated and disappeared? We didn't want to only focus on the white supremacist component of it, albeit that's a larger point of what we're trying to say with the film. We think that those two things need to live harmoniously in concert — that you're seeing the beauty and the resilience and the power of these women with the juxtaposition of the determination of a certain faction of white supremacy that finds it as a direct insult to their person to see this kind of achievement in Black people. Because when they see it, they have to confront the fact that they had gone out of their way to dehumanize us in order to justify the subjugation. And so the psychology around it became a much deeper and bigger conversation in our research and where we were trying to go with the movie.

Janelle Monáe's performance certainly brought that to life.

RENZ: Oh, we were just blown away by the passion her team had for it, that she had for the script. She desperately wanted to bring Veronica to the screen. It was interesting because this is our first feature film, and it was her first leading role. And so it was this adventure that we got to go on together that was crazy and scary and fun.

Tell us about your next project.

RENZ: It's funny because I guess the thing now is that we write a short story and then adapt it into a script, which we've done for our next film. It's called *Rapture*. We should be going into preproduction in a year or so. We wrote a television series as well that we're incredibly excited about that.

BUSH: Our determination is to tell a very specific kind of story. If you think back in movie history to the '70s and the '80s, some accused Hollywood of desensitizing audiences to violence. And now the opposite has happened, where there is this expectation of a theme park ride, rather than something that really engages you to think about the world that we live in, the reality of what that is. For us, we are engaged in the filmmaking process and cinema and television, because we are looking to do our part in contributing to the dialogue and the conversation to shift the collective consciousness and understanding that he, she, they who control the narrative have the power.
@gerardbush @christopherrenz

STEVEN CLAY HUNTER

Animator

For 30 years, Steven Clay Hunter has worked as an animator, helping to bring others' tales to life in productions like *Finding Nemo*, *Toy Story 2*, and *The Incredibles*. But with *Out* — his groundbreaking 2020 short that is the first Pixar film to feature a gay lead — Hunter finally got to tell his own story. Like his protagonist, the queer animator came out to his parents as an adult, albeit without the magical help of the film's fairy god-pets.

"I've been surprised at what an emotional journey it's been," Hunter says. "I'm especially moved by all the folks who were there along the way who helped me tell it."

Although LGBTQ+ representation has grown in leaps and bounds in recent years, animated productions have lagged behind — particularly those under the Disney umbrella. However, Hunter sees his short as the wave of the future.

Making *Out* "is just part of a continuum of storytelling that came before me and will continue afterwards," he says. "Queer stories have been on the fringes for a long time, but we're becoming more mainstream every year. And as we become more mainstream, I sure hope that it doesn't mean we lose the fighting spirit that got us here. We need to keep pushing for all of our stories to be told."

"Don't assume that it's somebody else's problem that you can put off or ignore," he adds. "Know that you're a part of something bigger than you and you can't hide from the world."

When not animating, Hunter enjoys sitting in his rocking chair "with a good book. And a cup of tea. And my baggy sweater. Does that make me old?" His holiday wish this year would be "hugs from people I haven't hugged in a long, long time, and the warmth of their company."

@thunderbubble

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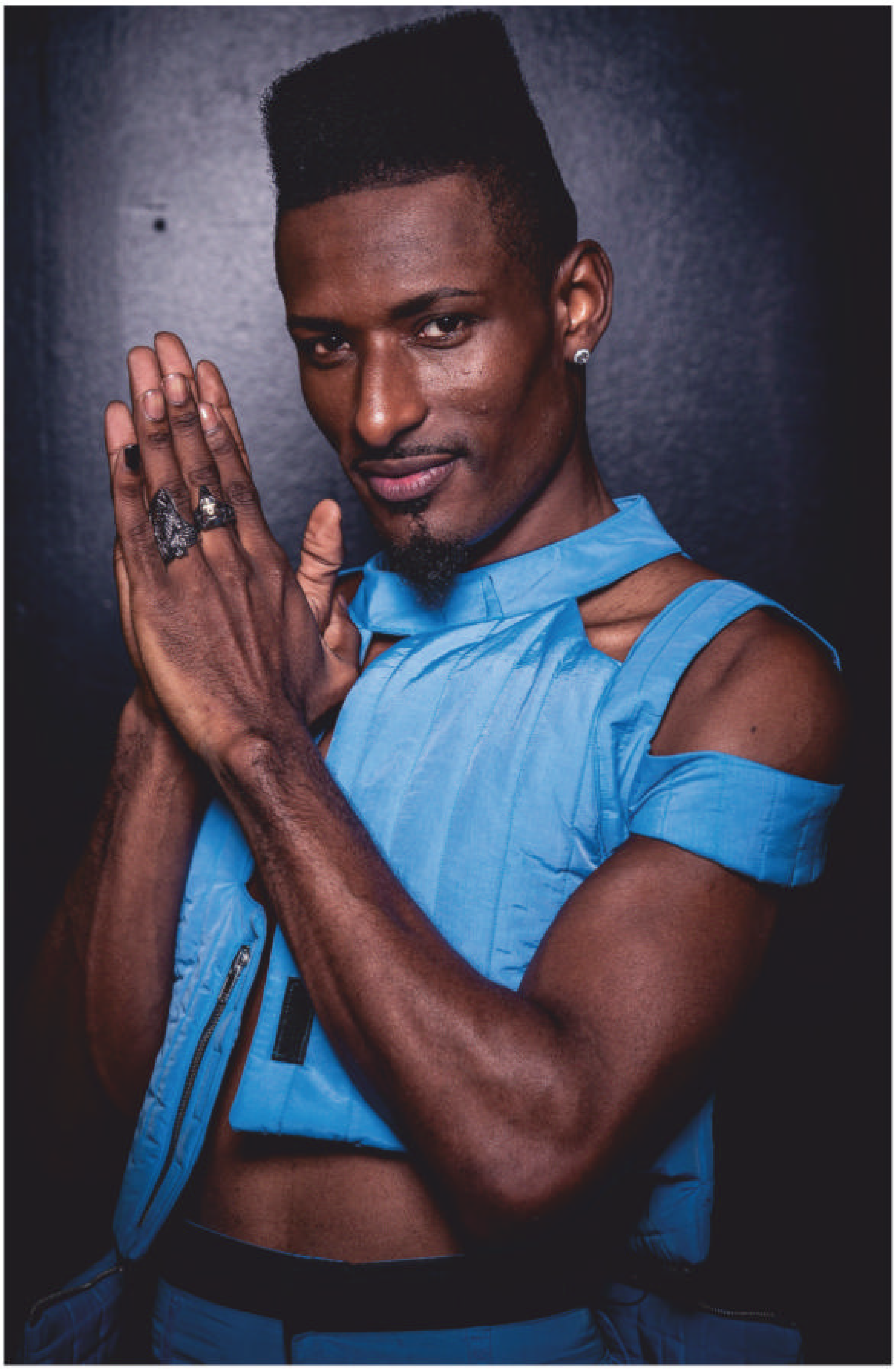


DASHAUN WESLEY

King of Vogue

It's been a legendary year for Dashaun Wesley. After portraying Shadow Wintour on *Pose*, the "King of Vogue" burst onto the reality television runway as the master of ceremonies on HBO Max's *Legendary*, a competition between eight voguing houses. Wesley is no stranger to this scene; he has danced and commentated in the New York City ballroom arena since he was a teenager. He's since showed off his moves on *America's Best Dance Crew*, BET's *Hit the Floor*, and *Magic Mike XXL*. Wesley describes his job as being "one of the best pilots in the flyer's seat for the style of voguing" who helps "guide passengers on the path of success with performances, education, and knowledge of the underground ballroom scene." His most recent productions have brought the world of ballroom to living rooms around the world, garnering a new generation of fans and practitioners. Wesley predicts ballroom culture will continue to grow over the next few years, "not only in numbers but in visibility." He expects changes to the competitive format as well. "I see more of a fixed and structured playing field for the newcomers and spectators. The rule system to be adjusted to give a better understanding to the lingo, categories, and titles given to the hard-working participants," he says. He also hopes to see the creation of a "marked historical location for the scene like a museum or building that we store our history and archive our legacy." @dashaunwesley

JAMAL SIMS

Choreographer

Jamal Sims first danced onto the scene in the late '90s, choreographing hit hip-hop videos for artists like Usher and Dru Hill. Since then, he has become one of the hottest choreographers in Hollywood, parlaying his talents into the world of film and television.

Sims, who says being out "means freedom," has remained dedicated to creating LGBTQ+-inclusive content throughout his 20-plus-year career. He's dabbled in producing and acting — and became an award-winning director with 2018's documentary *When the Beat Drops*. His dazzling choreography in last year's *Aladdin* live action reboot starring Will Smith blew audiences (and critics) away.

These days, Sims is probably most recognized as a longtime resident choreographer (along with Todrick Hall) across several of the *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchises. Though 2020 has been a challenging year, he says there were some wonderful highlights, like "reintroducing me to myself, spending quality time with my family, and falling in love." Sims says his hope for 2021 "is that we all can heal from 2020." @jamizzi

ZACH DILGARD FOR HBO MAX (WESLEY); NICK GILLIAN (SIMS)

CHEYENNE JACKSON

Actor, Singer

A bona fide Broadway star, Cheyenne Jackson made a transition to the small screen, eventually becaming a part of Ryan Murphy's world, appearing in *Glee* and *American Horror Story*.

This summer Jackson played a charmingly pernicious apparition in the teen-oriented Netflix series *Julie and the Phantoms*, which featured a sweet gay storyline in addition to its general queer sensibility. Regarding the series' subplot about teen boys in love, Jackson, who is gay, told our sibling publication *The Advocate*, "I'm 45. I came out when I was 19. It was a different world."

"As a 15-year-old queer kid in Idaho, to be able to turn on the TV and see a representation of just two cute boys liking each other — [and] *that's it? Like, no pain, no angst?* It would have been really powerful." In October, Jackson played pioneering gay liberation activist Dale Jennings in HBO Max's docuseries (with reenactments) *Equal*, about the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement. Also, his version of Katy Perry's "Teenage Dream," which he dedicated to "my man" on *The Seth Concert Series* in August, is a marvel.

In a year marked by so much change, the married dad of twins says he found solace in the work of another pop star: "I didn't know how much I needed Miley Cyrus singing 'Heart of Glass.'" As for what life will be like moving forward Jackson says, "It's going to be a meditation in innovation and simply being malleable." @mrcheyennejackson

JONNY MARLOW (JACKSON); COURTESY (REINHART)

LILI REINHART

Actress/Producer

Lili Reinhart has always been transparent, sharing her struggles with anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia; but there was one subject she hadn't shared until this year when the *Riverdale* actress came out to her 25 million followers on Instagram as "a proud bisexual woman."

"I was afraid of coming out," she later explained on our sibling podcast, *LGBTQ&A*. "I didn't want people to tell me that I was lying to get attention or something. I think that's why I didn't come out as bisexual until I was not in a relationship anymore. Because it's easy for people to question, 'Oh, but you're with a man — that's straight.'"

Although Reinhart has been lauded for her openness, she isn't sure such praise is warranted. As she writes in her new collection of poetry, *Swimming Lessons*, "I've only told the world/ what I feel,/ not how to overcome./ It feels fraudulent to be given/ a pat on the back/ for simply telling the truth."

When asked what accomplishment she is willing to accept praise for, Reinhart tells *Out*, "I'm very proud of the film *Chemical Hearts*, where I served as a first-time executive producer for Amazon. It was such a creatively fulfilling experience and I hold the movie so close to my heart." @lilireinhart

AMRIT KAPAI

Lawyer and Reality Star

Though 32-year-old Amrit Kapai had already achieved success practicing law in Miami, he "found another incredibly meaningful calling — serving as a voice for the South Asian LGBTQ community" through his role on *Family Karma*. The Bravo reality show follows a tightknit group of immigrants from India, and the inevitable culture-clashes that ensue now that they live in the United States.

"*Family Karma* embodies my opportunity to shine the spotlight on the challenges and distinct issues Indian LGBTQs face," Kapai says. "My unique role as the only gay cast member highlights my own struggles and the example I am striving to set, all the while promoting the central message to live our most authentic lives."

"The COVID-19 pandemic hammers home the importance of personal sacrifice for the greater good of humanity," Kapai adds. "The pandemic has also tempered my view of my own success by showing me that I am simply one of many...the Black Lives Matter movement continues to teach me empathy... [and] has forced me to face the truth about oppression, discrimination, and unequal civil liberties in our country. Looking the other way simply is not an option."

@amritkapai

BRANDON KYLE GOODMAN

Actor and Writer

Brandon Kyle Goodman has made the most of the global quarantine, using the visibility they've gained as an actor and writer to advocate for the Black Lives Matters protests, shining a disinfecting light on the violence suffered at the hands of police by people of color. Their viral video messages and activism netted over 80,000 followers in just a few days on social media, and brought much needed awareness and hard dollars to groups like The Innocence Project, The Bail Project, and NAACP. Goodman identifies as nonbinary. While they find their gender status doesn't necessarily make life harder in Hollywood at present, "being Black and queer definitely does. Always fighting to be seen as human, as more than just the 'gay assistant', the' sassy best friend', but instead someone with a full life, that is complicated, nuanced, flawed, joyful, painful, messy, and aspirational. Black people, and especially Black queer people are often positioned as a punch line, and if you're not willing to participate in that, it cuts you off at the knees since those are mostly the parts available." Goodman is penning the punchlines now after joining the writing room for seasons 4 and 5 of the irreverently hilarious Netflix animated series *Big Mouth*. They're writing for laughs for a more strategic purpose."I hope that TV and film will recognize and honor the fact that Black people, queer people, POC, and women are beyond capable of telling our own stories and that audiences are hungry for it." Next up for Goodman is *Human Resources*, a spin-off of *Big Mouth*. He'll be voicing Walter, a queer Black voice he wishes he'd seen on the shows of his youth."I'm excited for the world to meet him," he gushes. @brandonkgood

JONNY MARLOW (GOODMAN); ANDREW GLATT PHOTOGRAPHY (KAPAI)

FRANÇOIS ARNAUD

Actor

The Borgias actor who also appeared in *Schitt's Creek*, François Arnaud, came out as bisexual this year in an Instagram story in advance of Bi Visibility Day. The 35-year-old French Canadian posted that he was sharing his story to help combat "assumptions of straightness." Musing about why he'd previously kept silent about his sexuality, he wrote, "Probably because 'masculinity' is a most fragile currency, ready to nose-dive at the first sign of vulnerability or difference. And because it's really fucking scary to give up your privilege. Without a doubt, because stigmas of indecisiveness, infidelity, deception, and trendiness are still clinging to bisexuality."

Arnaud is fresh off filming the indie romantic thriller *The Winter House*, with Lili Taylor. Earlier this year, his anticipated return to theater after almost ten years fell through in the face of the pandemic. "I can't wait for the day we're able to be in a room full of strangers experiencing something together again. Hearing someone in the audience laugh at the wrong time," Arnaud says. He calls that kind of in-person experience, "so awkward," and yet so important.

Aside from the arts, Arnaud admits, "the only thing I'm actually genuinely passionately interested in is food. And wine. I'll eat anything and everything. I'm only ever thinking or talking about my next meal." @francoisarnaud

JO ELLEN PELLMAN

Actress

Jo Ellen Pellman was the only unknown cast in Ryan Murphy's film adaptation of the Tony-nominated musical, *The Prom*. She stars alongside heavy-hitters like Meryl Streep, James Corden, Nicole Kidman, and Andrew Rannells. "Working with this phenomenal cast and creative team to share this story with the world has been the greatest joy," says the queer-identified Pellman.

Pellman describes *The Prom* as "a love letter to Broadway, a queer coming of age story, and a celebration of many worldviews coming together to make something magical happen." She says it was the perfect film for 2020 because, "It offers a kind of hope that's rooted in reality, an optimism that persists in the face of inequality. *The Prom* embraces the idea that if we meet people where they are and have those tough conversations in search of a better, more just world, we all have the possibility of a happy ending." @jellpell

JONATHAN BENNETT

Actor and Host

Jonathan Bennett is a veteran of film and television, from the soap opera *All My Children* to movies like *Mean Girls* and *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*, but his latest role in Hallmark Channel's *The Christmas House* might be his most important. It's the first openly gay character in the network's fare of original holiday movies.

"I'm incredibly proud to be a part of this moment in history," Bennett say, noting that a "family film at the holidays with a love story that includes two men in a healthy loving relationship about to adopt their first child…is progress." The former host of *Cake Wars* is glad the LGBTQ+ community finally has affirming storylines in traditional holiday programming. "For years we just wanted a seat at the table. And this year, thanks to the progress and support of Hallmark, we have that seat when it comes to feel good Christmas stories." @jonathandbennett

JULIE PERREAULT (ARNAUD); MANFRED BAUMANN (BENNETT); MICHAEL SCHWARTZ (PERLMAN); JONATHAN BENNETT PHOTO BY @MANFREDBAUMANN MAKE UP @NELLYBAUMANN

MELISSA KING

Top Chef

Top Chef: Boston finalist Melissa King not only won 2020's *Top Chef All-Stars: Los Angeles*, in the process, she racked up more challenge wins than any other competitor in the history of the Bravo cooking competition. But as the show aired, the pandemic raged, leaving the restaurant industry devastated. "My revenue streams disappeared overnight," King recalls. But she was up to this challenge too. "The pandemic has inspired new beginnings," she explains. She's broadened her business model to include an apparel line, a small batch sauce line (which sold out online in 3 minutes), and virtual cooking classes.

"When the pandemic first started, I found many people struggling to cook for themselves and their families," King says. "These virtual classes have been a way for me to offer my skills and bring flavorful, yet approachable dishes into the comfort of your home."

Activism is a central consideration for King, who donated her entire $10,000 *Top Chef* Fan Favorite prize to Black Visions Collective, Asian Americans for Equality, The Trevor Project, and Asian Youth Center in Los Angeles. She donates money from each cooking class to similar causes.

"I stand proud representing my communities and showing that no matter who you are or where you come from, you can accomplish amazing things," says the Chinese-American, queer, gender-fluid chef. @chefmelissaking

JAMEELA JAMIL

Actress, Podcaster, Activist

The Good Place star, Jameela Jamil has paid a price for being a mouthy woman of color. When she speaks people react. This year alone, the British-South Asian activist and artist has held her own at political rallies, shared conversations on stage with feminist icons like Gloria Steinem, spoken about her disabilities, and navigated controversy about being a judge on the vogue-ball series, *Legendary* that led her to come out as queer — something she hadn't disclosed publicly previously.

The "feminist in progress" says now, "It's easy to just be silent and pretty and mysterious and inoffensive. But who do you help? What do you learn? What does anyone learn from you? What's the fucking point?"

Instead, Jamil says she "would rather be scrappy and authentic and grow in public and be an example to others that it's never too late to work on yourself. I'm someone who refuses to feel embarrassed about having a lot more to learn. I feel as though if we felt less shame around needing to be educated, we as a collective, would know more by now."

On *The Good Place*, her relentlessly optimistic and seemingly perfect character Tahini learns that lesson too, and over the four seasons of the show, she becomes a better person.

As the show ended in January, Jamil moved on to a slew of projects including TBS's *The Misery Index*. Fellow queers Sam Smith and Lizzo have appeared on Jamil's anti-shame platform and podcast, *I Weigh*, talking about body image and more. "I find freedom and safety in being honest with myself and with others," Jamil says.

Jamil is using *I Weigh* to "ask people much smarter and better than me, to take my place on my platform and teach all of us. I am not doing them a favor. They are doing all of us the favor." @jameelajamil

OVE IS LIFE
LOVE

HARVEY GUILLÉN

Actor and Musician

Harvey Guillén is everybody's favorite human familiar on FX's *What We Do in the Shadows*, and recently signed to show off his musical talents in the second season of NBC's *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*. There he's set for a multi-episode arc as George, a new programmer in search of approval from the titular character. He just wrapped production on the upcoming film *Werewolves Within*, based on the popular multiplayer Ubisoft game. The out queer 30-year-old Latinx star from Orange County, Calif., used to watch television as a child and lament the lack of characters and storylines that paralleled his own. Guillén is now that role model for a new generation of Latinx youth seeking affirmation of their identity and ethnicity in a media environment usually dominated by white faces and stories.

@harveyguillen

SAM FEDER

Director

Sam Feder's *Disclosure* is the documentary that everyone in media was talking about this year. From its hugely successful world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, to streaming on Netflix, to making *Indiewire*'s "Academy Awards Contenders" list, *Disclosure* (about trans representation in film and TV), was everywhere. The film's success, and the rest of 2020, came as a shock to Feder, a self-described introvert who "can spend days repotting my plants." As the trans director of the biggest trans documentary of the year, Feder is hoping their film doesn't just resonate with viewers, but can usher in real change. "I hope we see power given to and taken by more trans people in telling trans stories," they say. Feder required cisgender members of their documentary crew agree to train a trans person who is trying to break into Hollywood. In doing so, Feder created new opportunities and connections for trans storytellers. And now, whenever someone argues that there's nothing wrong with transphobic jokes or tropes on TV and it's okay to have cisgender folks writing and playing trans roles, we have *Disclosure* as a clear and concise clap back. @samfeder_1

BEX TAYLOR-KLAUS

Actor

Not surprisingly, Bex Taylor-Klaus says their recent wedding to *The Fosters*' Alicia Sixtos was the highlight of 2020. A Jewish kid from the South, the actor (*Arrow, The Killing, Scream*) describes their gender "as an elusive forest gecko with hidden genitalia and asexual reproduction. I love the term nonbinary because it feels like a good umbrella for a gender that constantly feels fluid and evolving."

That made playing the nonbinary character Brianna Bishop on *Deputy* an "extraordinary" experience for Taylor-Klaus. "Growing up, there was never an explicitly trans or nonbinary character in any media I consumed," the actor says. "I craved representation of something I didn't even know I was. When I got the opportunity to help create an actual nonbinary character whom I would have obsessed over as a lost child trying to find myself, I cried."

Up next for the actor is a medical drama *Triage*, in the meantime, we can fly with them (as Keo Venzee) in the *Star Wars: Squadrons* video game. @bex_tk

SUSAN YE @ENPOINTE (KING); TK (JAMIL); OLIVER WHEELDON (GUILLIEN); TEXAS ISAIAH (FEDER); ADAM KENT PHOTOGRAPHY SHOOT PLANNING/DESIGN BY WINK! WEDDINGS (TAYLOR-KLAUS)

SHAKINA NAYFACK

Actress

The character Shakina Nayfack plays in *Connecting...* wasn't originally trans. But Nayfack still booked the part — making her the first out trans person to have a starring role in a network comedy — which was then re-written for her. Anyone who's seen Nayfack in the *Transparent* musical finale, in *Difficult People*, or onstage in her one-woman show, *Manifest Pussy*, can understand why: she's a star.

"We're seeing trans characters move beyond stereotypes and our stories move beyond tropes, but fundamentally, when you consider who the producers and execs are, who's literally behind the camera and in the cutting room, most trans stories are still being told by cis people," Nayfack says. "There are a lot of seats that need to be filled by trans folks before we are truly in charge of how our stories get told."

Connecting... solidifies Nayfack's place in television history, but it's also been a monumental year in her personal life because she had a revision to her gender confirmation surgery. "We need to normalize GCS revisions for trans women," Nayfack argues. "It's a major operation and it often takes more than one step to get right. If you're reading this and you're a post-op trans woman with pussy problems, your experience is valid and I support you going in for that second round." @shakeenz

THEO GERMAINE

Actor

After breakout roles in Netflix's *The Politician* and Showtime's *Work in Progress*, Theo Germaine's career may stand as proof of what is now possible for a nonbinary actor in Hollywood. While trans and nonbinary representation has dramatically increased in the past two to three years, Germaine says, "I'm discouraged by how we sometimes pat ourselves on the back during the times we've done the bare minimum in regards to inclusion in the industry. A lot of people are being kept out." For example, they say, "I'm not seeing enough trans people being hired in other aspects of the industry yet. And those of us who are hired — many of us are thin and able bodied. That needs to change now." Germaine uses their platform to ensure that when we turn on our TVs, we don't just see the select few trans people that Hollywood has deemed "palatable."

With the success of their two shows, both of which were picked up for multiple seasons, Germaine's life has changed with a fierceness and intensity they're still adjusting to. Experiencing housing and financial instability prior to being cast on *The Politician*, they struggled to get their basic needs met through periodic theater gigs, food service, burlesque performances, office temping, pet care, occasional escorting, selling art, "and basically just taking any gig I could to pay all my bills and try to keep working towards the goal I had for acting." They wanted to be a series regular before they turned 40; their talent, drive, and work ethic got them there before 25. @theogermaine

WILLIAM RUSAN (GERMAINE); MOJO DISCO (NAYFACK)

KEKE PALMER

Actress and Singer

Since actress, singer, and TV personality Lauren Keyana "Keke" Palmer made her debut in 2005's *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*, she's become one of the hardest working women in Hollywood. Palmer has been featured in countless films and television shows while also balancing a successful career as a recording artist.

Palmer continued to push boundaries with her riveting performance in 2018's *Pimp*, in which she played a queer pimp struggling to free herself and her girlfriend from the dangerous ties that bound them. In 2019, she starred in the wildly popular *Hustlers* with Jennifer Lopez. These days you won't want to miss Palmer flex her comedic chops in the new streaming series *Turnt up with Taylors*, in which she single-handedly portrays multiple members of a dysfunctional reality TV family.

The multi-talented star has won numerous awards for her contributions to both the arts and the Black community. This year she has also hosted major virtual events, like the 2020 Video Music Awards on MTV— and (more importantly), the Nickelodeon special, *Kids Pick the President*. @kekepalmer

LAWRENCE ROBINSON (PALMER)

GINA YASHERE

Comedian

British-Nigerian lesbian stand-up comedian Gina Yashere came to the U.S. as a finalist on NBC's *Last Comic Standing* in 2007 and never left. As adept on stage on a Olivia cruise as she is on a Hollywood backlot, Yashere was tapped by Chuck Lorre (creator of *Mom*, *Big Bang Theory*, et al) to co-create, produce, write, and act in the CBS comedy series, *Bob Hearts Abishola*. The first series to feature a Nigerian family, its second season debuts in November.

"Stand-up is, and will always be my first love, as the freedom of live comedy can't be beaten, but I also love bringing my characters to life," Yashere says about her *Abishola* character Kemi.

The 46-year-old has two Netflix specials (*Skinny B*tch* and *Laughing to America*), is a commentator on *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah*, and has a memoir (*Cack-Handed*) out next year.

For now, Yashere admits she's stopped watching or listening to the news. "Never thought I'd look back at Bush as the good old days of Republican racism," she jokes. But she's hopeful that 2020 will actually be a turning point for racial equality. "This year has been a perfect storm — the whole world at home watching George Floyd being murdered, and this time being unable to turn a blind eye, coupled with the worldwide protests. It just feels different. People are finally listening to us. I don't know how long it will last, but I'm going to get as many through that open door as possible." @ginayashere

JEREMY POPE

Actor

Actor Jeremy Pope burst onto the scene in Ryan Murphy's hit Netflix series *Hollywood*, playing gay Black screenwriter Archie Coleman. The series pulled back the curtain on Tinsel Town's historical queer subtext and his performance earned him an Emmy nomination, to pair with the two Tony Award nominations he earned last year for *Choir Boys* and *Ain't Too Proud*, winning the latter. Pope is representative of a new, more diverse class of artists coming to the fore. He describes his work as "telling stories I always longed to hear growing up" and "making people feel seen and heard through the characters that I choose to embody."

The rising star sees the industry evolving in the next few years, "making space for the voices and stories this industry and the country have historically silenced. Black and brown voices, queer stories, women's stories. Stories that shed light on what this society has repeatedly deemed unworthy." When he's not giving voice to the unheard through his work, Pope has been centering himself with the family he was born into and the one he chose. "Love while you can," advises Pope. @jeremypope

SOPHIE ANDREASSEND (POPE); STEVE PEIRCE (YASHERE)

STEPHEN BUSKEN

DAVID COLLINS, MICHAEL WILLIAMS, AND ROB ERIC

Scout Productions

If part of your self-care routine during this rocky year has been binging episodes of *Queer Eye* on Netflix or discovering HBO Max's reality series about drag houses, *Legendary*, then you have Scout Productions co-founders David Collins, Michael Williams, and chief creative officer Rob Eric to thank. The team behind the juggernaut reboot of the queer makeover series isn't stopping there. This September, Scout Productions launched a documentary unit after the company received orders for the four-part docuseries *Equal* (HBO Max), about the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement, and *Get Real* for Quibi, about the rise of reality TV.

"I'm a producer in title on many scripted, unscripted, and doc projects, but first and foremost I'm a storyteller," Collins says of his work. "I'm especially interested in people who are unable or haven't had the opportunity to share – whether it's the marginalized communities in *Legendary*, the unsung LGBTQ activists in *Equal*, or the individual heroes of each *Queer Eye* episode."

"Whether it's the story of five gay men helping out a straight man and realizing their differences mean less than their similarities or celebrating the unique LGBTQIA+ family structures of ballroom culture, each story we tell at Scout should push a social dialogue forward," Eric adds.

It's been a year of evolution for Scout Productions, Williams says. "Our company has been blessed with many opportunities in the past few months, so we're thankfully hard at work. I'm coming away from this year feeling more grateful than ever."

The men behind our favorite escapes have their own ways to unwind. Williams loves to cook while Eric became obsessed with *The Great Pottery Throwdown*.

But, Eric stresses, it's not all about checking out, saying, "A divided country, rampant racism, escalated violence towards our brothers and sisters in our community, a global pandemic, essentially every nightmare scenario come to life. 2020 should have taught all of us that we need to work harder and be far more diligent in creating a better future for ourselves and for our children." @scoutprod

ALEX THE ASTRONAUT

Singer-Songwriter

"I make songs about the things I see around me. It's strange to me that it's my work now, it was something I did when I was little to understand those things happening around me." A rising Australian singer-songwriter, Alex the Astronaut's music doesn't fit into a specific genre as much as it creates vivid worlds for the listener to live in. "Music and storytelling is such a powerful way of connecting everyone and I'm really proud to be able to do it every day."

Their first album, *The Theory of Absolutely Nothing*, which debuted earlier this year, captures growing pains in song, as an angsty yet jubilant exploration of identity and self. But while they were celebrating the release, much of the world was thrust into chaos. "I've learned more about racism and the white supremacy I hold than I have in all the years before and I wish I had started doing more work earlier," they say. "I hope to see more people of color in decision making positions in the music industry. It's long overdue and it'll make our industry a better place to work." @alex.the.astronaut

GIA WOODS

Pop Singer

Back in 2015, Gia Woods made a huge splash by coming out in her music video for the catchy bedroom pop song "Only a Girl." Since then, she's amassed over 300,000 viewers for a Twitch performance, appeared in Calvin Klein's Pride campaign, become a Savage x Fenty ambassador, and released her debut EP *Cut Season*. Woods describes her music as "honest, sensual, moody, alt dark pop" that reflects who she was growing up as a shy and closeted teen, and who she is now.

"I want my music to be understood and relatable to anyone," she says. But she also knows who her biggest fans are. "I feel that with my words and even sound, it makes it diverse enough to not even feel like a 'lesbian' song to some. Although, my music definitely may hit harder for another lesbian." *Cut Season* has cemented Woods as one of the most exciting young singers today. The EP is both pop and personal and sends a clear message to anyone listening. "I have finally learned to cut ties," she says. "What doesn't help you grow isn't important to hold onto, from people to habits. I didn't call my EP *Cut Season* for no reason, *duh*!" @giawoods

JESS GLEESON (ALEX); MARSHALL FIELDS (WOODS)

HAMED SINNO

Singer/Advocate

Hamed Sinno — frontman of Mashrou Leila, one of the most influential queer-led bands in the Middle East — is no stranger to speaking out about societal atrocities that affect marginalized people. He's been vocal about the ongoing civil wars in his homeland, and this year he was especially poignant speaking about the death of Egyptian queer activist Sarah Hegazi, who died by suicide this June after suffering three years of systematic torture since being arrested for flying the LGBTQ+ Pride flag during a Mashrou Leila concert in Cairo. Sinno was deeply affected by her death and performed a moving musical tribute to the late activist on social media. Sinno now says, "We are who we mourn. F**k the police. We are a lot stronger than we think we are — and shouldn't have to be. Gratitude is everything. Friendship is survival."
@hamed.sinno

S.G. GOODMAN

Musician

Emerging from the small Mississippi River town of Hickman, Ky., S.G. Goodman is a refreshingly original voice that pays homage to her Appalachian roots while stepping away from its bigoted past. The young queer singer's songs speak to those often overlooked in her socially conservative state and she hopes to see "a lot more diversity and representation across genres....The music industry needs to read the room and realize that we need to see more women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ folks rising on the charts."
@s.g.goodman

NYSSA

Rocker

When you listen to queer indie rocker Nyssa's music, you immediately start seeing colors and landscapes. Her sound conjures images of vast sunsets, long roads, and adventures with close friends. If you ask Nyssa herself, she'll say it sounds like "the soundtrack to a queer road movie. *Monster* meets *Desert Hearts*." With her soaring rock vocals and plenty of reverb, this is definitely a movie you'll want to see.

Nyssa released her debut album *Girls Like Me* earlier this year, and has been defying definition and expectations since. Her songs "Hey Jackie" and "The Swans" contain bits of Springsteen, parts of the Pretenders, and hints of early 2000's era indie rock greats like The Strokes and Bloc Party, but all of it is decidedly queer. "Starting a song from a queer foundation presents me with the opportunity to imagine a utopian alternate reality," she says. "Or to explore the no-so friendly past with a fine-tuned and specifically freaky viewfinder." It's this unique viewpoint that makes her music stand out. Nyssa is presenting us not with rock as it is, but rock as it could be, how she wants it to be. Nyssa's excited for the future of queer rock, and when she looks at it, all she sees is a "total takeover" and we hope she's right. @thisisnyssa

HOJUN YU (SINNO); SAMUEL ENGELKING (NYSSA); MEREDITH TRUAX (GOODMAN)

PABLO ALBORÁN

Spanish Singer

In June, for Pride month, 31-year-old Spanish singer-songwriter Pablo Alborán came out as a proud gay man in a video message posted to his Instagram account. "Today, I want my voice to be louder and for it to have more value and weight. I'm here to tell you that I am homosexual and it's okay," he told his millions of followers. "Life goes on, everything will remain the same, but I'm going to be a little happier than I already am." This year, the Grammy-nominated artist, who broke through with his 2010 hit "Solamente Tú," also released his fifth studio album *Vértigo*, and received an outpouring of support from fans and his peers, including Ricky Martin. "You don't know how many men and women you have helped with this video," the superstar wrote in his comments section. With his coming out, Alborán says he hopes to help other LGBTQ+ people who are struggling to share their truth. "That's why today, without fear, I hope I can make somebody's journey easier with this message," he said. "But above all, I do this for me."

@pabloalboran

COURTESY SUBJECT

LUKE GILFORD

LIZZO

Pop-Rap Star

It'd be easy to call on the usual tropes of the badass Black woman when talking about Lizzo — her embodiment of her own sexuality not despite her size but *because* of it — could call for it. But the 32-year-old flute playing, pop-rap goddess should be celebrated just as much for her music as her persona, forcing a music industry that tends to celebrate women only within strict confines to adapt just so it could embrace her, in all of her brash and busty glory, inclduging her vocalness about sexuality andr mental health struggles.

The music industry has long thrived on perpetuating the kind of glass closets that allow music execs to package LGBTQ+ artists for mainstream America's consumption without ever acknowledging that part of what makes them so fabulous is their queerness.That's PR101 and artists often comply.

Even queer folks tend to call Lizzo an "ally," even when she's wearing a rainbow dress, standing in the Stonewall Inn, singing her ass off about acceptance.

People did the same with Lady Gaga in her early years, but that's dismissive of an important part of the LGBTQ+ umbrella that Lizzo and Gaga both fall under, whether they call it biseuxal, queer, pan, or no-labels. Lizzo's made it clear that while she may not like labels, she's anything but straight — and in 2020, she's been one of the most powerful icons for LGBTQ+ folks everywhere.

"When it comes to sexuality or gender, I personally don't ascribe to just one thing," she told *Teen Vogue* in 2019. "I cannot sit here right now and tell you I'm just one thing. That's why the colors for LGBTQ+ are a rainbow! Because there's a spectrum and right now we try to keep it black and white. That's just not working for me."

At the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards, Lizzo got eight nominations, the most of any artist, and she took home awards for Best Urban Contemporary Album, Best Pop Solo Performance for "Truth Hurts," and Best Traditional R&B Performance for "Jerome." She's won a Billboard Music Award, a BET Award and two Soul Train Music Awards. *Time* magazine named her "Entertainer of the Year" in 2019, a year she also made the leap to the big screen (*Hustlers*, *UglyDolls*).

Who knew that a band nerd from junior high could grow up to be the hottest queer musician on the planet and suddenly make the flute hot again, sparking a woodwind renaissance that hasn't been seen since the saxophone enjoyed a revival in the 1990s. (@lizzobeeating)

LEO ROCHA

Journalist

Leo Rocha, a reporter at KOMU TV in Columbia, Mo., gives voice to the voiceless, especially those whose experiences tend to be ignored, like queer BIPOC and those with HIV. Currently working on a documentary about the late MTV star and activist Pedro Zamora, the gay Colombian-American journalist has worked in local news, digital media, and print. “No matter where I go, it’s my personal goal to make sure marginalized people are properly represented both in newsrooms and in the content we produce,” he says, arguing that Gen Z journalists should break outdated traditions in the newsroom. “We don’t believe in the traditional notion of ‘objectivity,’ which inherently punishes journalists who belong to marginalized groups for speaking up against racism or homophobia. Every day, I wake up as a visible Latino man. That’s how the world sees me. Every interaction I have is rooted in my identity. It’s not something I can turn off. So instead of focusing on a journalist being ‘objective,’ it’s really the work itself that should be objective. And you do that by using facts and outlining the process of how you got them, which good journalists should be doing anyway.” @leonardodrocha

JAMIE MARGOLIN

Climate Activist & Film Student

At just 18 years old, Jamie Margolin has cofounded the international youth climate justice movement Zero Hour and written a guide to becoming a young organizer for any cause, *Youth to Power*. A New York University film student, she says she has a “determination to make Hollywood a place where LGBTQ+ people of all backgrounds can see our stories represented on-screen.” Her life motto nods to an Ayesha Erotica song: “I do it for the girls and the gays — that’s it,” she says. “I am fiercely protective and caring for my LGBTQ+ community, and I am devoting my life to making sure movies and TV shows actually fairly and accurately tell our stories and represent us.”

Margolin says “she wants to see the film world become a place where people or all backgrounds, genders, races, religions, sexualities, ethnicities, and abilities can tell their stories without being seen as automatically ‘pushing an agenda.’ I want to stop seeing the same old destructive tropes over and over again. I want to see lesbian Disney princesses, queer superheroes and supervillains, and a world where the norm isn’t the straight white male perspective. I want to see the industry change so that it’s no longer the norm and people come to expect diverse stories told by the members for their communities.” @jamie_s_margolin

MXMTOON

Musician

Singer-songwriter mxmtoon rose to fame with her debut EP, *Plum Blossom*, which she recorded on her laptop in her parents’ guest bedroom. It’s been streamed over 100 million times, proving the power of social media.” So much of the industry used to be kept behind glass doors and feel unreachable to most people,” she says. “But now, I think it’s become something where anyone can venture in.” The bisexual 20-year-old sees it as her responsibility to “stand up for issues I believe in and for the people who take the time to support me.” Still, she knows change can be slow. “Life happens at its own pace, and while it can feel like a race to have all of the solutions to problems out of our control, you’re one individual. Not everything can be controlled by you, and while that can be terrifying, it’s OK to let go and allow things to just happen.” @mxmtoon

ALYZA ENRIQUEZ (ROCHA); COURTESY SUBJECT (MARGOLIN); BLYTHE THOMAS (MXMTOON)

FLYNN SANT A.K.A. FLOWERKID

Musician

Hearing Flowerkid, the musical project of 19-year-old Flynn Sant, grapple with emotions born from childhood trauma offering a through line to his life as a young trans man, it's hard not to be rattled. How many young trans teens have struggled with the same issues, only without the propellant drums and distorted synths forcing us to face those same raw emotions? Sydney-based Flowerkid's single "Miss Andry," which he wrote and produced, was born out of a hatred and distrust for men, feelings that became more complex when Flynn came out as trans man.

"I will always feel this inadequacy with any cisgender man," he admits, "but when I made this song, I needed to regroup and basically take responsibility. I'd say, you know, 'It isn't healthy to be thinking these things. I feel this way because of the events that happened in my life and childhood trauma I've experienced. But it's not an excuse to hate all men.'"

"When I made the song, I was terrified because it was so truthful. It was so raw. It was like ripping myself open for everyone to see. There's this whole new level of anger to it that I don't necessarily like to show. But I think being honest about it will help me resolve those feelings."

The song is evocative of something we've heard from other trans men, especially survivors of sexual assault. "I think that feeling of hatred and inadequacy is a universal feeling felt by not just trans men but also trans women too," says Sant. "I wanted to explain that feeling — and give us all an anthem to cry to."

Songs like "Boy With the Winfields and the Wild Heart," uses the same type of raw and brutal lyrics to speak about mental health, depression, grief, and "the weight of the world on your shoulders."

As a child, Sant sang first into the voice memo app on his iPod. Soon he was in his bedroom making real, gut-punch music like "Late Night Therapy," his first single. Now that he's inked deals with Warner Music Australia, Atlantic, and the U.K.'s Parlophone, Sant is set to blow up. He's got a new single out in December and an EP early next year. @flowerkidmusic

KIDD KENN

Musician

This year, the 17-year-old gay rapper Kidd Kenn lit up the first online MOBIfest (alongside artists like Mila Jam and Saucy Santana) and was named to the GLAAD and *Teen Vogue* 20 Under 20 list. His recent mixtape, *Child's Play*, proved the unapologetically queer artist has something to say, opening doors for queers in hip-hop. He's the next big thing, simply for being himself. "In my music, my young age helps because I'm still experiencing so many new things, so it gives me more content to rap about," says Kenn, one of the few out queer Black rappers. "I don't think my young age hinders my music. I do what I do. My fans can relate to my music. And even with me being young, I'm so mature."

Kenn's new EP, *Problem Child*, features tracks with Asian Doll, Dai Burger, and Delli Boe. Creating the album was thrilling, Kenn says. "I enjoy it so much that it really doesn't feel like work most of the times," he says. "My music is feel-good music. It's empowering and uplifting." He promises more in 2021 and maybe his most emotional unreleased song "I've always wanted to make a personal song about getting yourself together and focusing on your goals before trying to pursue a relationship." @kidkenn

LEVON BAIRD (FLOWERKID); BIANCA GRCIA (KID KENN)

MARK SHAW

KADEEM ALPHANSO FYFFE

Muxe New York Founder

Jamaican-American Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe was just 19 when he signed with the elite modeling agency Wilhelmina. He's since appeared in TV, film, and theatrical productions but is best known as the founder and creative director of Muxe New York, a gender-free label that started with streetwear but is expanding into ready-to-wear next year.

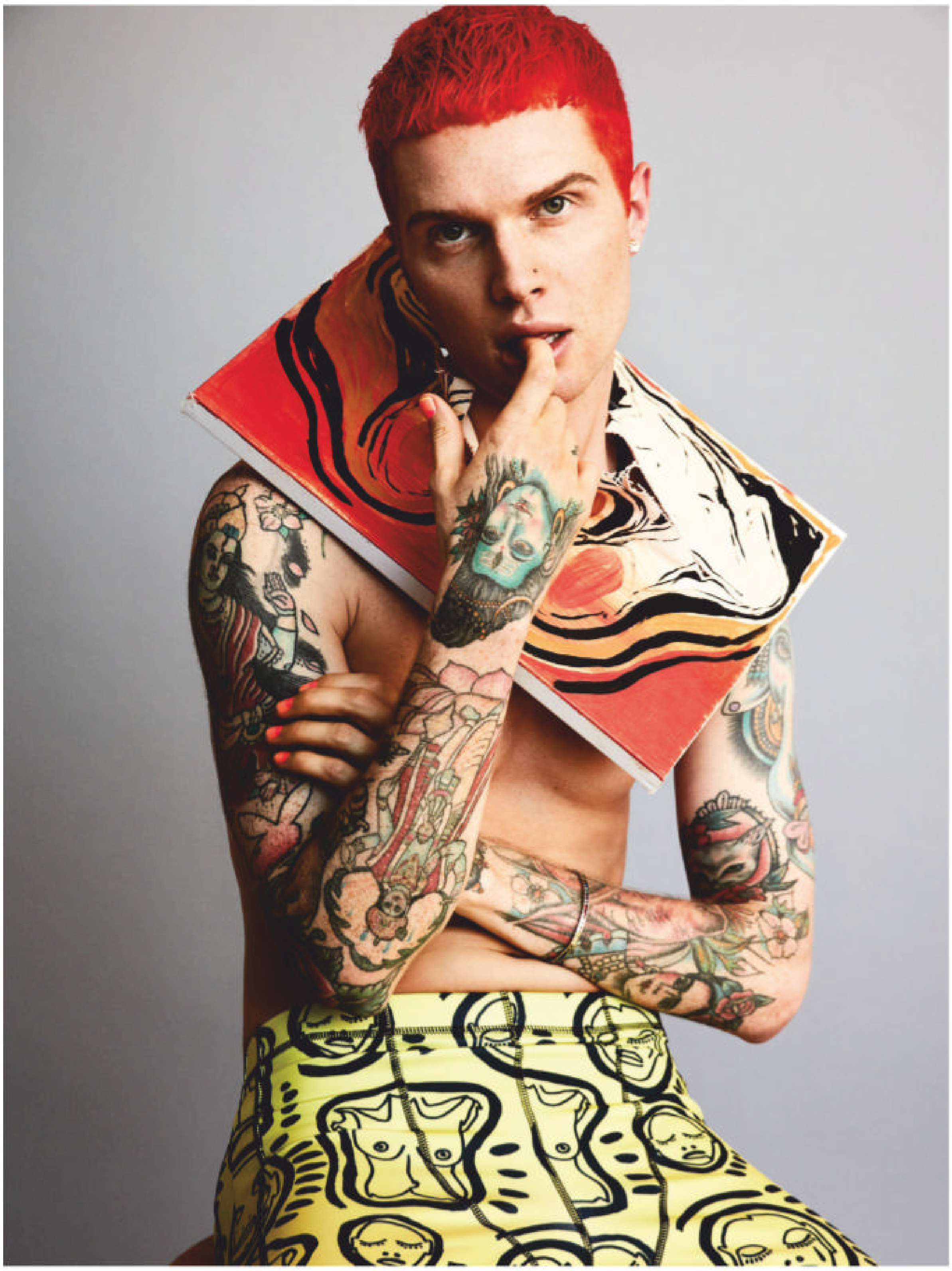
The brand's "Equality" T-shirt was everywhere in 2020, which Fyffe attributes to the fact that "now more than ever, people understand the need for equality. The shirt is political, fashion-forward, and a perfect conversation starter, because it champions a universal message. So often inclusive clothing can be co-opted by large Pride campaigns or well-intentioned brands. This year, and especially on the heels of the intense corporatization of WorldPride, I think that people are looking to send a clear message of equality and acceptance that feels a little more authentic."

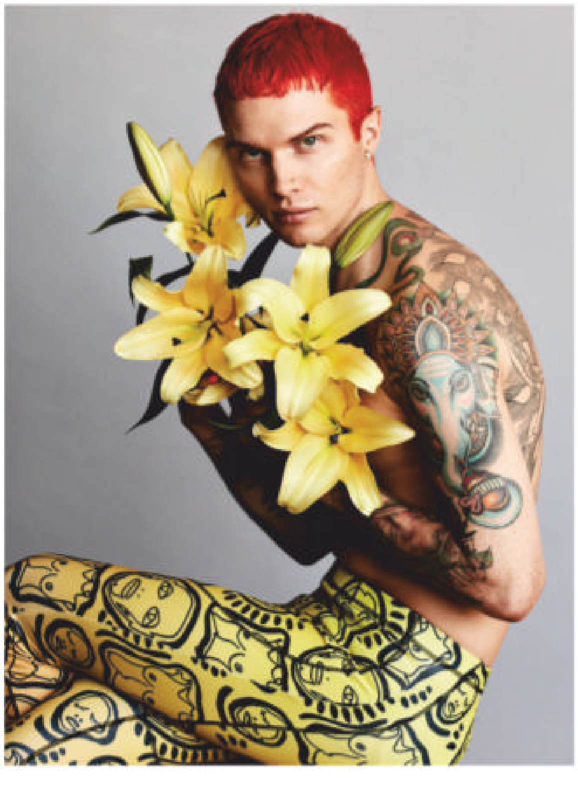
Fyffe defines himself as "an artist first, fashion designer second, and a fierce advocate for my community, always." He says his work "fuses social commentary, fashion, and gender fluidity to help push our culture towards a world that is free of so many of the shackles that we all are subject to on a daily basis. Part of my mission is to ensure that young people growing up today feel freer to be themselves and express who they are."

Fyffe serves as a committee member for Live Out Loud, a New York-based LGBTQ+ youth organization, and donates a portion of Muxe sales to support queer minority youth.

He says he started Muxe "to disrupt traditional streetwear — by centering social justice and LGBTQ+ issues and bodies within the context of fashion and streetwear. I want the people who wear my clothes to feel like one of the 'cool kids' no matter their race, sexuality, body size, gender identity, or expression. I purposely show my designs on a widely diverse group of models including Black, nonbinary, trans [people] to represent my own intersectional identity as a Black queer gender-fluid individual, with the hope of inspiring others to live their lives authentically and to pursue their dreams fiercely."

"This year has been strange, to say the least," Fyffe reflects. "But it has reminded me who I am, why I do what I do, and the significance of my work within the LGBTQ+ community." He says he hopes the outpouring of support for his and other Black-owned businesses will continue, but more importantly, "it is critical that we all continue to make it clear that just because everyone's social media feeds might not be full of #BLM content anymore, Black lives still matter and the fight isn't over. Real change takes sustained advocacy that isn't a fad. Keep buying from Black-owned brands. Keep featuring Black creatives. Keep centering and celebrating Black narratives. Keep marching. Keep protesting." @k_alphanso





MIKAEL SCHULZ

PATRICK CHURCH

Designer and Artist

Patrick Church's pieces — featuring his signature graphic prints of hand-painted, often crying faces — have become a must-have for global superstars and Instagram baddies alike, who await the latest bodysuits, caps, swimwear, handbags, masks, and more. For the artist and designer, who works with models of all genders, body types, and races, there was never a doubt that his brand was going to be for everybody.

"It's really important for me to be inclusive," Church says. "I want to remain very aware, especially with what's going on around us at the moment."

Disrupting the velvet rope mentality of fashion week, Church has kept everyone guessing by opting for innovative ways to present his collections. He has staged weddings in which models of all genders kissed against painted backdrops, and one season he invited the public to model the clothing. "Fashion can feel really elitist and exclusive," he explains. "I just never would want anyone feeling like it's something they couldn't be a part of."

Hailing from England, the artist moved to New York to be with his husband, Adriel Church-Herrera. Unable to work for about 10 months because of his immigration status, he homed in on the loneliness he was feeling in the big city. "To feel so alone was very alien to me, because you're surrounded by so many people," Church says. "So I wanted to make a pattern that was everlasting or an artwork series that was never-ending, like a family of people that keeps growing and growing."

Thanks to his growing customer base — including Megan Thee Stallion on *Saturday Night Live* — he has created the community he longed for. "People are often like, 'Who is your favorite celebrity you dressed?' and to me that isn't so important," he says. "It's often when I'm scrolling through Instagram and seeing these kids in small towns, because I was a kid in a small town looking at these designers and thinking it was so impossible for me to be able to be a part of that world."

Next, Church says, "I would love to do another art exhibition, because to me the artwork is the heart of everything I do. Without the artwork, there's no prints for the clothes, and it's so personal to me."

@patrickchurchny

NANCY MAHON

SVP, Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability, Estée Lauder

As senior vice president of corporate citizenship and sustainability at the Estée Lauder Companies, Nancy Mahon has helped the beauty and fragrance leader launch industry-first initiatives: building on-site solar arrays, developing biodiversity action plans, switching to more sustainable packaging by 2025, supporting low-income women in global supply chains, doubling the amount spent with Black-owned businesses, and dedicating $10 million to support racial and social justice initiatives in the next three years.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating impact it has had on communities least resourced to combat the virus has underscored and deepened so many of the inequities across the world," Mahon reflects. "It has also underscored the inextricable link between climate justice and the many social equity issues we face — particularly racial and gender justice."

The 56-year-old lesbian, who has been married for 25 years and has two children, says she's proud to work at a company "that understands that having leaders with diverse experiences and perspectives builds a more successful and humane business. As a person from a minority community…I believe we now have a historic opportunity and responsibility to together build a more equitable, resilient, and just world. Let's make the most of this moment." @EsteeLauder

GLOBAL CITIZENS
SUSTAINABILITY

IVAN BART

President of IMG Models & Fashion

As president of IMG Models & Fashion, Ivan Bart is helping to revolutionize the fashion industry by treating the models he represents as people instead of assets and more reflective of the broader public.

"We want the most inclusive, diverse roster," Bart says, explaining it's a "huge bonus to us to…see their potential and to elevate the kinds of work that they do."

Bart says his "big *aha* moment" was the conscious decision to start signing nonbinary talent. "That has been a huge shift for us, and an exciting one."

As much as Bart is looking to the future, he also remains very aware of the past. "1969 was very much like 2020," Bart says, noting the similarities in the "feelings and emotions" of the current times and those of the Stonewall era, and how historically marginalized people in both periods finally tired of oppression and made a stand.

"All those feelings are going on until finally 'enough is enough,'" he says. The response that night was to fight back, and that marked the beginning of the modern struggle for LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance. As Bart sees it, Stonewall was the LGBTQ+ Battle of Lexington and Concord, except the colonial rebels were replaced by drag queens and a bunch of fed-up queers.

"It's like our Independence Day," he says. "It's the closest I can come to it. It was the start of it." @ivanmbar

COURTESY SUBJECTS (BOTH)

PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN FOR GETTY IMAGES

SIMON PORTE JACQUEMUS

Fashion Designer

One of the most ubiquitous and coveted labels of the past two years, Jacquemus has had a meteoric rise to internet stardom and tastemaker popularity from a synergy of branding: chic, tiny bags that have gone viral on the internet, an arsenal of A-list celebrity muses including Bella Hadid and Barbie Ferreira, and a tailored twist on the 1980s Côte d'Azur aesthetic that is as blissfully nostalgic as it is strikingly modern. To say that Simon Porte Jacquemus — the man behind the phenomenon — is taking the fashion industry by storm would be an understatement.

By making a high-end fashion brand feel like the most needed dose of escapism and authenticity in 2020, Jacquemus has been able to bridge the gap between gay sensibility and camp, something that is extremely rare. And he's done it for years. From bringing back dramatic oversize straw hats with nude models to using the Jacquemus Instagram page as a lush travel and design diary, Jacquemus has made fashion feel fun again. His designs and savoir-faire remind us that fashion used to be shamelessly queer, tongue-in-cheek, and innovative.

And it doesn't stop there: Jacquemus has made strides toward sustainability by combining menswear and womenswear shows going forward and by showcasing his latest collection, L'Anée 97, with a diverse range of models, raising the bar for what a true lifestyle and fantasy brand should be. @jacquemus

BRETMAN ROCK

Beauty Entrepreneur

Bretman Rock is the digital superstar of the new generation. His outlandish and unabashedly queer personality displayed in the fashionista's entertaining beauty videos have quickly made Rock into an internet sensation. But his multiple talents have pushed him beyond just online fame. Born in the Philippines and raised in Hawaii, the 22-year-old has found huge success in the beauty industry, already having collaborated with brands like Morphe and ColourPop.

This year, Rock partnered with Wet n Wild to create his Jungle Rock collection, which sold out online within minutes after its release. The young beauty guru landed on the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list, but he's not letting it go to his head. Rock is passionate about many environmental and children's causes, and he regularly helps raise funds for nonprofits like the Ocean Conservancy and the Make-a-Wish Foundation. @bretmanrock

PATRICK STARRR

ONE/SIZE Founder

When beauty content pioneer Patrick Starrr launched his new line of beauty care products ONE/SIZE, the larger-than-life gay Filipino-American sought to "redefine beauty by elevating voices of the unheard and creating space for everyone to belong in our movement for radical expression." Starrr is the queer community's plus-size everyman, and ONE/SIZE reflects his "personal mantra that makeup is a one-size-fits-all" proposition. Starrr seeks to "manifest beauty" through his work and claim space for those marginalized by the industry.

"Ever since I was young, I've been told I was a Renaissance man," says Starrr, but he's not stuck in the past. He prefers to remain focused on the future. His wish list for 2021? "Freedom of expression, freedom to love, freedom to be seen and heard. I think freedom is the theme for 2021." @patrickstarrr

SIMONE KIMONE (ROCK); PETER SIMONDA (STARRR)

JONNY COTA

Making the Cut Winner

Though he has over a decade of fashion retail experience with his first label, Skingraft, Jonny Cota became a household name this year when he won the first season of Tim Gunn and Heidi Klum's new fashion competition series, *Making the Cut*. And to Cota, the future of fashion is nonbinary.

"A philosophy that has always governed my fashion is to be gender-inclusive," he says. "I've sent down countless male-identified models in dresses without even thinking about it. To be honest, I never want to brand my aesthetic as being gender-free or unisex. That's just a given."

Cota has spent much of the year speaking out against industry racism and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement as well as preparing to open a storefront in downtown Los Angeles.

"It's an interesting challenge to keep your business running — to continue to be able to pay your team, you need to make sales but to not sound tone-deaf while you are announcing new promotions with your brand," says Cota. "So for us, we teamed up with Tom of Finland. We did this big mask promotion.... Of every mask sold, we donated one to the L.A. LGBT Center. So it's like, OK, you can continue to be a small business. You can continue to promote to your customers. But you better be talking about what's happening right now, and you better be finding a way to help." @jonnycota

HEATHER STEN (NORRIS); AMAZON STUDIOS (COTA)

WILLIE NORRIS

Founder of WILLIENORRISWORKSHOP

A self-described "queer fashion designer with a thing for words," Willie Norris, founder of WILLIENORRISWORKSHOP, has mastered the art of the fashion statement — literally. This year, the Brooklyn-based designer relaunched his web store, with his coveted tees with bold slogans like "Promote Homosexuality" and "What Exactly Is Heterosexuality and What Causes It?" Spreading the word of queerness further, his collaboration with Helmut Lang, brilliantly called Helmut Language, included pieces emblazoned with the phrases "The Words Are Right in Front of You" and "Confess Conceal."

"What I'm doing is looking at business and apparel in a different way than how most people are, and I'm also uplifting queer people through my work," Norris says.

For the Brooklyn Liberation rally and march, Norris and a team of volunteers screen-printed and handed out about 600 "Black Trans Lives Matter" T-shirts for free.

Answering the call of his close friend and lead organizer West Dakota (a fellow Out100 honoree this year), he and a team of organizers and volunteers put out an open call for hundreds of T-shirts, which they would have one week to print. "The whole genesis behind it was a really queer way to look at how to make clothes for a crowd," he says. "There was nothing new sourced; it was us using resources that we have as a community now to make our project a reality."

"That event showed the power that what you put on your body can contribute to an overall movement," Norris notes. "Such a huge part of the impact and the virality of that moment was the aerial pictures of seeing everyone in white."

Norris says he declined many requests to sell the T-shirt after the historic day, because the tees were beside the point. "It was a symbolic placeholder that you came out, you showed up, and you're doing the work on your own," he says. "Find a Black trans woman yourself, befriend someone, befriend an artist group of Black trans women and support them on your own accord." @willienorrisworkshop

VIKTOR & ROLF

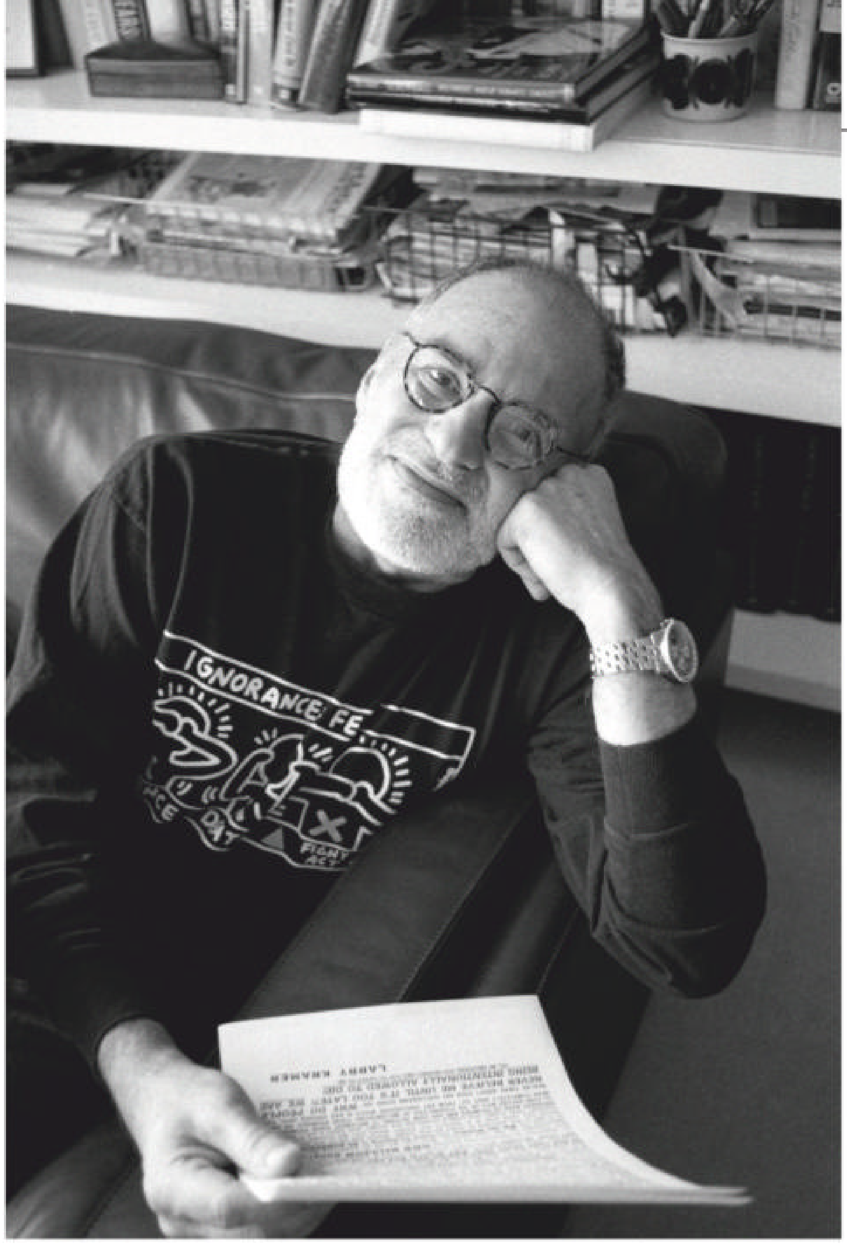
Fashion Duo

The amazing creations by fashion duo Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, branded simply as Viktor & Rolf, have always been otherworldly — but this year the fashion designers brought new meaning to the term "going viral" with their latest collection directly addressing the global pandemic.

They've also adapted to the changing times by putting on virtual fashion shows and including a very artistic video introduction of the new collection on their official site. "We all deserve to be loved, regardless of age, color, gender, race, religion, or sexuality," says a voice-over in the video.

The collection includes three mini wardrobes made up of a negligee, dressing gown, and coat that are "meant to represent pandemic-related emotional states." Large spikes on oversize coats represent social distancing, while a halo of hearts on another design represents our unity in this time — and the collection overall evokes the emotional roller coaster we've all experienced this year. @viktorandrolf

STEPHANE CARDINALE CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



CATHERINE MCGANN FOR GETTY IMAGES

Remembering Larry Kramer

The writer and activist's confrontational style shocked America into dealing with the AIDS crisis and demanded equality for LGBTQ+ people. His legacy will forever live in his work and the community at large.

BY MATT BOMER

It's impossible to overstate the importance and impact of Larry Kramer in the LGBTQ+ community. His years of tireless advocacy, organization, and, yes, acrimony, effected changes in our collective landscape that we are all the beneficiaries of today. From being one of the founding members of Gay Men's Health Crisis to starting ACT UP, which has been responsible for the development and release of almost every lifesaving treatment for HIV/AIDS, Larry truly changed the world.

Larry, who died in May, was a pioneer in our march toward equal rights, and I believe we would all be at a different place today if it weren't for him. To see his fire on full display, I highly recommend the documentary *How to Survive a Plague*.

It was through his art that what I love so dearly about Larry came to the forefront: his passionate, beautiful, open heart. Born in Bridgeport, Conn., in 1935 to what he called "the generation psychoanalysts tried to change," Larry attended Yale and began his career working in film, and he was nominated for an Oscar for the screenplay for *Women in Love*.

While his 1978 novel, *Faggots*, made him a polarizing figure in the gay community, it was in the theater that Larry found his true voice. He wrote with the urgency and political perspective of Shaw and Brecht. He wrote plays that made a difference, that changed hearts and minds, that catalyzed our community and our allies. His writing is urgent, economical, and grounded in reality, rarely using metaphor. It doesn't allow the audience to look away. And though his greatest works were largely autobiographical, they could never be described as solipsistic. They were for the greater good of all of us.

Though Larry doubted whether one could be both an artist and an activist, he most assuredly was. I'll never forget reading *The Normal Heart* and *The Destiny of Me* as a teenager in Texas, and being awakened to all that was going on in the world around me. Because of Larry, I realized that "I belong to a culture that includes Proust, Henry James, Tchaikovsky, Cole Porter, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle," among others. The warnings and clarion calls were tempered with pride and self-acceptance.

By the time I met Larry, I saw little of the firebrand I was expecting. There he was, in his uniform of overalls with a cardigan over a shirt. Still an artist on fire, he was surrounded with thousands of pages of his current writing, workshopping a reading of one of his plays, and completely dedicated to his amazing husband, David Webster.

There were books everywhere — books that had been read and absorbed, books with broken backs. In my experience, he was a dream collaborator, quietly confident and trusting of the artists tasked with bringing *The Normal Heart* to the screen. He, like *The Boys in the Band* playwright Mart Crowley, knew that the effectiveness of what he had written would transcend interpretation. One of the highlights of my professional life was seeing Larry and Mart, who we also sadly lost this year (see opposite page), reunite at the 2018 Broadway opening of *The Boys in the Band*. Larry was as passionate as a man could be and of course had opinions about everything. He was also very funny. But mostly I remember sitting before him like a welcome disciple and laughing as he, ever curious about life, asked me questions while we both ate the cupcakes I had brought for him. He was the rebel who taught me how to save my own life and the wise uncle who was curious about and loving toward the life he saved.

I will always love you, Larry Kramer. As an artist and as an activist. We are so grateful to you for fighting the good fight for us all. Thank you for your refusal to be silent or polite. Thank you for your rage. Thank you for teaching us how to be resilient.

Like all great artists, Larry lives on forever in his work — the personal and the political, the tragedy and the triumph, the individual and all of us collectively. Underneath the words, however, will always be his beautiful, inexhaustible heart.

I'll leave you with a quote from Mr. Kramer. I find that his words are especially true for us all in 2020: "Life doesn't make sense. But change does. And there is no change without tenacity. And change is usually very hard, with precious few gratifications along the way to encourage you to carry on. And some change is good. And necessary. And some change must not be allowed."

Matt Bomer is an actor, activist, husband, and father. @mattbomer

BY NEAL BROVERMAN AND TRUDY RING

Monica Roberts

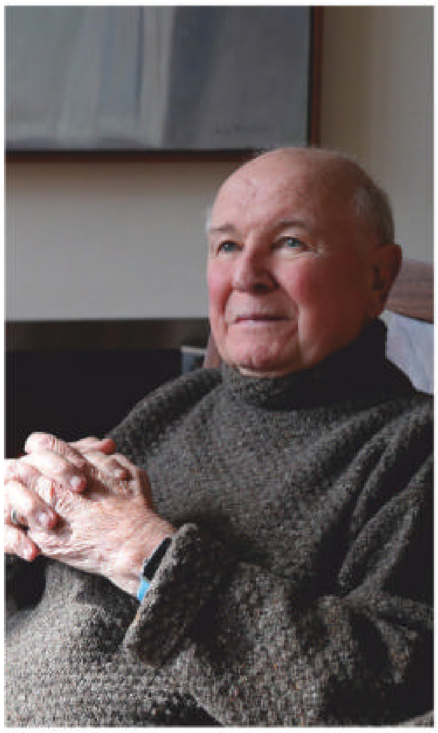
1962 - 2020

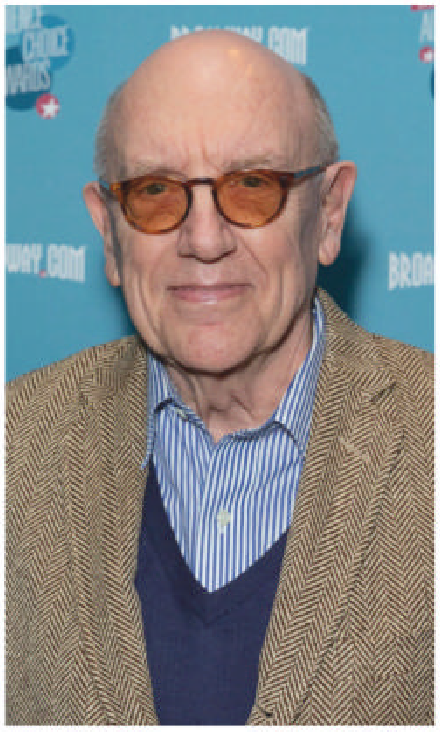
Ten years ago, the pervasive violence against transgender people was not an issue recognized outside LGBTQ+ circles. We can thank Monica Roberts for elevating that conversation. Before her death in October at age 58, the Houston-based activist-journalist tracked the grim milestones of anti-trans violence on her blog *TransGriot*. Launching in 2005, the website was an essential source for coverage of the lives — and sadly, the many deaths — of transgender people particularly trans women of color, who face shorter lifespans and much higher rates of violence. Roberts's reporting pushed back against deadnaming and challenged erasure by law enforcement and the media alike. In addition to her groundbreaking, award-winning reporting, she cofounded the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition and organized Louisville's Transsistahs-Transbrothas Conference in 2005 and 2006. She was a warm and engaging presence, mentoring young queer journalists and serving as a role model for all, especially Black LGBTQ+ youth. Roberts was also a sports fan, a proud Houstonian, and up to her last days, politically engaged, supporting trans candidates and the removal of Donald Trump.

Terrence McNally

1938 - 2020

Playwright Terrence McNally was one of the first celebrities to die of COVID-19 complications, passing in March. He wrote many pioneering plays, including *The Ritz, Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune, The Lisbon Traviata*, and *Love! Valour! Compassion!* He won Tony Awards for the latter as well as for *Master Class* and for the books of the musicals *Ragtime* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. He also received a Tony Award for lifetime achievement in 2019. His works were notable not only for their high quality but for introducing gay characters to a wide audience. McNally is survived by husband, Tom Kirdahy.





Mart Crowley

1935 - 2020

Mart Crowley (above), who died in March at 84 after undergoing heart surgery, was best known for his groundbreaking 1968 off-Broadway play *The Boys in the Band*, which portrayed a group of gay and bisexual men gathered for a birthday party where the alcohol flows freely and the insults fly. It was a hit and an eye-opener for straight audiences, but some LGBTQ+ people thought it depicted the community in a negative light.

But later viewings make it clear the characters' self-loathing is largely a response to societal homophobia, and their drinking a means of self-medication. The *Boys* won a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play in 2018, and a Netflix film adaptation with the full cast of the revival (all out actors) premiered in September. The writer penned other plays, including a sequel, *The Men From the Boys*, and he was a producer on the popular TV series *Hart to Hart*, starring Robert Wagner. Wagner was married to of one of Crowley's closest friends, the great actress Natalie Wood, who he recalled encouraged him to write *The Boys in the Band*. Seeing *Boys* come to Broadway and win a Tony "was the highlight of [Crowley's] life," Wagner told *The New York Times* upon the playwright's death.

Phyllis Lyon

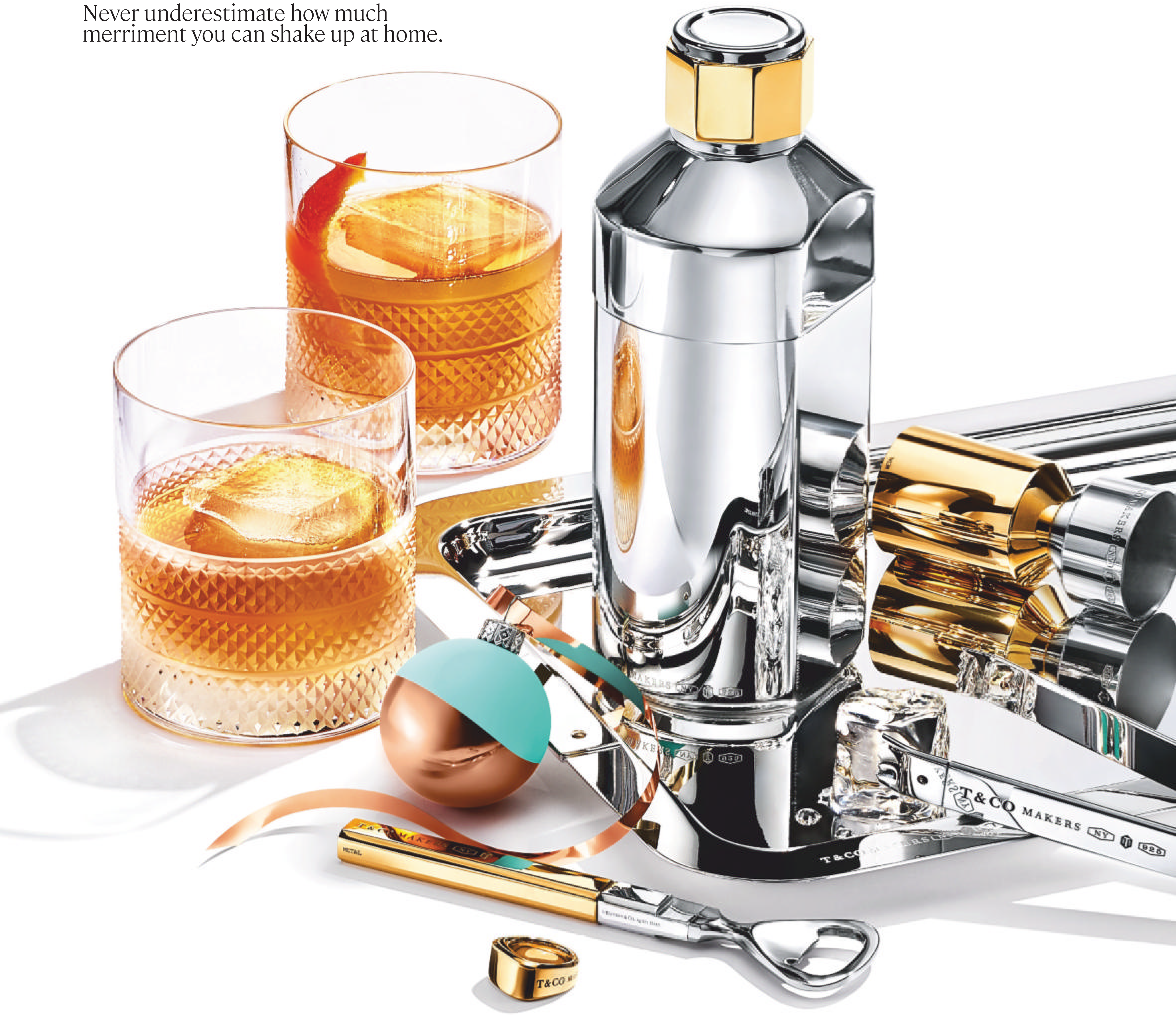
1924 - 2020

This heroic woman is remembered by many as one of the first lesbians, along with wife Del Martin (seated below), to legally wed in California. But the advocacy of Phyllis Lyon encompassed much more. In 1955, Lyon, along with Martin and three other female couples, launched one of the first modern lesbian organizations, the Daughters of Bilitis. Together they swayed powerful figures to the queer causes like then-Mayor Dianne Feinstein. Their gay news and culture magazine, *The Ladder*, debuted in 1956 and lasted until 1972. Their later work covered LGBTQ+ health, elder care, and feminist causes. The couple sued for marriage equality in the case that resulted in the California Supreme Court striking down the state's ban on same-sex marriage in 2008, and they were one of the two first same-sex couples to marry as soon as that ruling went into effect. Martin passed away two months later, before California voters rescinded marriage equality with the passage of Proposition 8 (which itself was later struck down).

DIANE ANDERSON-MINSHALL (ROBERTS); AL PEREIRA FOR GETTY IMAGES (MCNALLY); SHUTTERSTOCK (CROWLEY); DEANNE FITZMAURICE WITH SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES (LYON)

WHO NEEDS A DRINK?

Never underestimate how much merriment you can shake up at home.



Take **Tiffany & Co.**'s lineup of essential barware out for a nightcap. Whether you're just looking for a new set of crystal martini glasses with sterling silver cocktail picks, sterling silver ice tongs and Diamond point ice bucket, or sterling silver and 18 karat yellow gold flask, the jeweler has you covered.

The **Tiffany Men's 1837 Makers** collection of design gives a special nod to the company's hollowware workshop and legacy of handcrafting sports trophies. So yes, the next time you're sipping a cocktail catching up with friends on Zoom, you could be name dropping how your bar spoon was crafted by the same folks who create the megawatt trophies for the NBA, NFL, PGA Tour, and more. (Prices vary, Tiffany.com)

COURTESY TIFFANY & CO.

Badass Hair

How director Justin Simien wove hair and the lengths Black women have to go for success into a horror film.

BY DAVID ARTAVIA

ABOVE Elle Lorraine (center), with costars Lena Waithe (right) and Yaani King Mondschein (left) in the comedy horror *Bad Hair*
BELOW LEFT Laverne Cox surveys her handiwork on Lorraine's new weave

There are some scary truths about weaves and hair extensions, but nothing is scarier than being demonically possessed by them. That's the major anchor in director Justin Simien's latest horror comedy, *Bad Hair*, now streaming on Hulu. The film, set in 1989 is a long-overdue project that is an allegory about how false beauty standards placed on Black women can have a lasting effect.

The campiness of *Bad Hair* is as delicious as its log line sounds. The film follows an ambitious young Black woman named Anna Bludso (played by Elle Lorraine), who, after being criticized for her hairstyle by Vanessa Williams's character (Zora with the "good hair"), gets a weave in the hopes of succeeding in her job at Culture TV, an MTV-like channel. Laverne Cox plays Virgie, the beauty salon owner recommended to Anna. In a gory scene of the killer weave being sewn into Anna's natural hair, the sinister Virgie jump-starts the plot that takes Anna down an evil — and witchy — road.

Cox found a deeper and more personal message in the campy film, remembering a time when she was navigating life as a young actress trying to make it in New York City.

"I thought, *If I want to be successful, I need to look like Halle Berry* or *I need to look like Beyoncé or Angela Bassett*, or *What can I do to make myself marketable, to make myself shape-shift?*" Cox recalls. She didn't look like any of those women. "I look like Laverne," she says. "And the world has changed, and luckily there's a space for me to be a working actor, which is amazing, but I think we often still get messages, particularly Black women and particularly around our hair, that we have to do something that's not the way the hair grows out of our heads if we want to be successful. I think that is really the intersection of capitalism and white supremacy. [American author-activist] bell hooks uses the [phrase] imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to note the intersectional nature of how these systems operate together. In *Bad Hair*, we see the collision of capitalism with white supremacy, and we also see it with patriarchy with some of Anna's relationships with men."

For Simien, whose 2014 film, *Dear White People*, won the Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, and went on to become a hit series on Netflix, the fascination with hair horror began when he discovered several Asian films about possessed wigs and hair — specifically 2005's *The Wig* from South Korean director Won Shin-yeon. An epiphany happened when Simien discovered that while hair is often a horror motif in that part of the world, it seemed to be missing as a trope in the States.

COURTESY HULU (BOTH FILM STILLS); RICK PROCTOR (SIMIEN)

"There wasn't really anything like it speaking to an American experience," Simien says. "I mean, there's an episode called 'Hell Toupee' about a toupee from hell on [the 1980s TV series] *Amazing Stories*, and then *The Simpsons*, but there wasn't anything Black. And certainly there wasn't anything about Black women."

This led Simien to do more research, where he discovered that 1989, the year in which *Bad Hair* is set, was a pivotal year in the life of the weave.

"That was, really, when Janet Jackson's new look for *Rhythm Nation* hit the public consciousness," he explains. "That also was the year where Black musical artists were able to be pop artists for the first time without being perfect the way Michael Jackson or Whitney Houston had to be a few years prior. You could just be able to dance and have a cute sound and be able to come in there, show your attitude, and become a pop star in that way. Yet these same pop stars that invented new jack swing, you couldn't find them on the radar just five years later. White people were singing that music — and it was called pop — and why talk about Karyn White and Bobby Brown and Keith Sweat and Janet Jackson? 'It's Britney Spears. We invented it!' It just felt like the same kind of raw deal that Anna is getting in the movie, like, 'Get this and your dreams will come true. Oh, and you might kill a few people. And it might take you over completely. But that's fine. You know, that's in the fine print.'"

There's also an ancestral component in the film, which was important for Simien. "As Black people in this country, we're completely cut off from our history. It's why we go by 'Black,' because most of us don't know what nation or origin we're from. A lot of those early slave folklore stories, I was never exposed to that stuff. I was just told it was racist. I never read that stuff, and I started reading it and doing research for the film and realized there's actually so many really good lessons for me as a Black person trying to survive in a world that wasn't made for me in this folklore that I've also been cut off from."

He continues, "I just wanted it to feel like if Anna had a way to connect with the wisdom of her ancestors sooner, maybe she could have navigated this a little bit easier. And just the tragedy of that and the Black experience, how much we're cut off from ancient wisdom that other cultures get to hold in their families and in their family lines. I don't think most of us even really recognize what a loss that is." ■

"As Black people, we're cut off from ancient wisdom that other cultures get to hold in their families and in their family lines. I don't think most of us even really recognize what a loss that is." — Justin Simien

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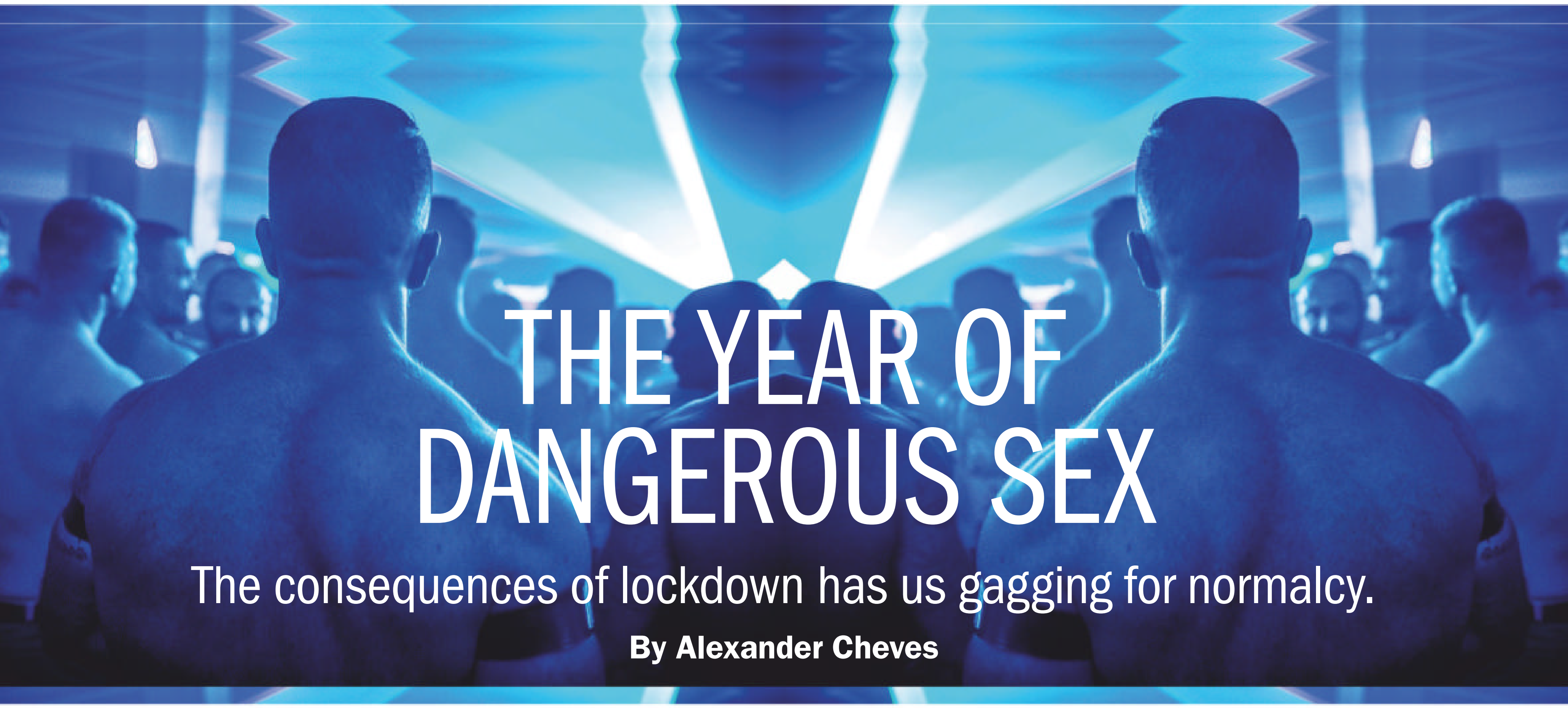

THE YEAR OF DANGEROUS SEX

The consequences of lockdown has us gagging for normalcy.

By Alexander Cheves

ON JUNE 26, 2015 — the day *Obergefell v. Hodges* established marriage equality for same-sex couples across the nation — I was drunk in a Savannah, Ga., gay bar with Destiny Myklz, the drag queen emcee of Club One. She sauntered up in a red dress and kissed me on the cheek. We started talking, as friends do, about bathroom blow jobs. I told her I was surprised there wasn't a "back room" of the club. She rolled her eyes.

"Honey, there was one," she said. She pointed to the bathroom. "This entrance to the bathroom is new. Back in the day, the entrance was over there" — she panned a jeweled finger across the empty dance floor — "and you went down this long dark hallway with one red light bulb hanging in the middle. Use your imagination."

I asked why it changed. "We could no longer rely on gays," she said of the venue's move to diversify its audience. "We had to get more straight-friendly. Gays used to line up around the block to get in here. They have Grindr now."

I started college in 2010, the year Grindr hit the app store, so my entire sex life — from first erotic fumblings to my HIV diagnosis — happened on apps. Of course, mine is part of a larger story of what many queer people describe as a cultural shift to digital space. As landmark queer venues closed, driven out by rising rent costs and shifting urban landscapes, cities got cleaner and more expensive. Surveillance technology improved and police increased patrolling, restricting park and bathroom cruising. Cultural opinions of queer people shifted with increased media exposure. Bathhouses became relics of an underground past. Instead, we found unprecedented access to each other online. Some of us lamented about this, but mostly we saw it as inevitable progress as the world barreled ahead — until 2020.

The pandemic has given us a real taste of what we thought things had become. Lockdowns resulted in fewer sex partners, strained relationships, and sometimes purely virtual sex. Data had previously shown that young people are having less sex than past generations, so 2020, in its way, may have been the result of our increasingly disconnected culture, delivered early. Sex parties became naughty group Zoom meetings. Grindr, designed to foster IRL hookups, suddenly had to be enough on its own. But could it?

At the start of the pandemic, I was stringent. Sexts and slutty video calls were possible, but I mostly committed to focusing on other parts of my life outside sex that needed attention. At first this felt very easy to do. Two months later, I was on Fire Island with my boyfriend. The six-person party became a 50-person party, then a 200-person party — and we stayed. At some point, he pulled me onto the porch of the house and said, "I feel guilty. Should we be here?" I said, "We're already here." Later, I was grateful not to have been photographed.

Even in our so-called digital age, we were never cut off from IRL connections. Until we were, and it was — it is — excruciating. Everyone I know believes the scientists, reads the number of deaths, and despises the way the government has handled the crisis. Friends were hospitalized; others lost family members. Yet one by one, many of the most careful among us have broken the rules and made exceptions. How long can you live without touch? It's the strange lesson of the year. With over 230,000 Americans dead and new spikes in cases across the country, we still need skin against skin.

Can we be surprised? Even in the darkest days of AIDS, underground sex parties continued. Today, many gay bars in New York — the city hit hardest by this pandemic and the one before it — are closed, and the best may not reopen. The remaining queer sex clubs and bathhouses in the country may not survive. And yet 2020 might be the year we reverse course because most of us have concluded digital sex is not enough.

Already, gay public cruising grounds are back in the parks. "How 1979!" an older friend said. Is the face mask the new condom? Public shaming — mostly online — of those who flout social distancing and continue to host gatherings appears similar to the campaign against gay bathhouses in the '80s, largely led by activists like the late Larry Kramer. Those resulted in the city's forced closure of legacy places like Mineshaft and the New St. Mark's Baths in '85. It seems punitive at this moment to speculate about the aftermath of this pandemic, but it's worth asking: What will queer gatherings look like in the years ahead? ■

Alexander Chves is an author and sex expert working on his debut book, out in 2020 from Unbound Edition Press. (lovebeastly.com)

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